



UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

1945 - 1967

IV. C. 7. (b)

Volume II

THE AIR WAR IN NORTH VIETNAM

#538

VOLUME II

THE AIR WAR IN NORTH VIE-NAM

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IV. THE ATTEMPT TO DE-ESCALATE -- JANUARY-JULY 1967

During the first seven months of 1967 a running battle was fought within the Johnson Administration between the advocates of a greatly expanded air campaign against North Vietnam, one that might genuinely be called "strategic," and the disillusioned doves who urged relaxation, if not complete suspension, of the bombing in the interests of greater effectiveness and the possibilities for peace. The "hawks" of course were primarily the military, but in war-time their power and influence with an incumbent Administration is disproportionate. McNamara, supported quantitatively by John McNaughton in ISA, led the attempt to de-escalate the bombing. Treading the uncertain middle ground at different times in the debate were William Bundy at State, Air Force Secretary Harold Brown and, most importantly, the President himself. Buffeted from right and left he determinedly tried to pursue the temperate course, escalating gradually in the late spring but levelling off again in the summer. To do so was far from easy because such a course really pleased no one (and, it should be added, did not offer much prospect for a breakthrough one way or the other). It was an unhappy, contentious time in which the decibal level of the debate went up markedly but the difficult decision was not taken -- it was avoided.

A. The Year Begins with No Change

1. Escalation Proposals

The year 1967 began with the military commands still grumbling about the Christmas and New Year's truces ordered from Washington. Both had been grossly violated by multiple VC incidents, and both had been the occasions of major VC/NVA resupply efforts. The restrictions placed on U.S. forces were felt by the field commands to be at the expense of American life. U.S. military authorities would argue long and hard against a truce for the TET Lunar New Year holiday, but in the end they would loose.

Early in 1967, CINCPAC reopened his campaign to win Washington approval for air strikes against a wider list of targets in North Vietnam. On January 14 CINCPAC sent the JCS a restatement of the objectives for ROLLING THUNDER he had developed in 1966, noting his belief that they remained valid for 1967. 1/ Four days later he forwarded a long detailed list of proposed new targets for attack. What he proposed was a comprehensive destruction of North Vietnam's military and industrial base in Route Package 6 (Hanoi-Haiphong). 2/ This called for the destruction of 7 power plants (all except the one in the very center of Hanoi, and the 2 in Haiphong included in a special Haiphong package); 10 "war supporting industries" (with the Thai Nguyen iron and steel plant at the head of the list); 20 transportation support facilities; 44 military complexes; 26 POL targets; and 28 targets in Haiphong and the other ports (including docks, shipyards, POL, power plants, etc.). CINCPAC

optimistically contended that this voluminous target system could be attacked with no increase in sorties and with an actual decline in aircraft lost to hostile fire.

The proposal was evidently received in Washington with something less than enthusiasm. The Chiefs did not send such a recommendation to the Secretary and there is no evidence that the matter was given serious high level attention at that time. On January 25 in a cable on anti-infiltration (i.e. the much-maligned barrier), CINCPAC again raised the question. He was careful to note (as he had previously in a private cable to Wheeler and Westmoreland on January 3) 3/ that, "...no single measure can stop infiltration." 4/ But he argued that the extraordinary measures the enemy had taken to strengthen his air defenses and generate a world opinion against the bombing were evidence of how much the air strikes were hurting him.

These arguments were reinforced by the January CIA analysis which also made something of a case for a heavier bombing campaign. It considered a number of alternative target systems -- modern industry, shipping, the Red River levees, and other targets -- and two interdiction campaigns, one "unlimited" and the other restricted to the southern NVN panhandle and Laos, and concluded that the unlimited campaign was the most promising. 5/

On the modern industry target list, CIA included 20 facilities, 7 of them electric power plants. Knocking out these facilities, it said, would eliminate the fruits of several hundred million dollars capital investment, cut off the source of one-fourth of the GNP and most foreign exchange earnings; disrupt other sectors of the economy which used their products; add to the burden of aid required from NVN's allies, and temporarily displace the urban labor force. The loss would be a serious blow to NVN's hopes for economic progress and status, negating a decade of intense effort devoted to the construction of modern industry. This would exert additional pressure on the regime, but would not by itself, CIA believed, be intense enough to bring Hanoi to the negotiating table. Outside aid could no doubt make up the deficit in goods to sustain the economy and the national defense of the North as well as to continue the war in the South. 6/

Aerial mining, provided it was extended to coastal and inland waters as well as the harbors, and especially if accompanied by intensive armed reconnaissance against all LOCs to China, would be very serious. NVN would almost certainly have to reduce some import programs, not sufficiently perhaps to degrade the flow of essential military supplies or prevent continued support of the war in SVN, but enough to hurt the economy. 7/

Bombing the levee system which kept the Red River under control, if timed correctly, could cause large crop losses and force NVN to import

large amounts of rice. Depending on the success of interdiction efforts, such imports might overload the transport system. The levees themselves could be repaired in a matter of weeks, however, and any military effects of bombing them would be limited and short-lived. 8/

An "unlimited" campaign against transportation and remaining targets, in addition to attacking industry and mining the harbors and waterways, would greatly increase the costs and difficulties in maintaining the flow of the most essential military and civilian goods within NVN. If the attack on transportation were able to cut the capacity of the railroads by 1/3 on a sustained basis and roads by 1/4, the remaining available route capacity would not be sufficient to satisfy NVN's minimum daily needs:

If an unlimited interdiction program were highly successful, the regime would encounter increasing difficulty and cost in maintaining the flow of some of their most essential military and economic goods. In the long term the uncertainties and difficulties resulting from the cumulative effect of the air campaigns would probably cause Hanoi to undertake a basic reassessment of the probable course of the war and the extent of the regime's commitment to it. 9/

By contrast, according to the CIA analysis, restricting the bombing to the Panhandle of NVN and Laos would tend to strengthen Hanoi's will. The main effect would be to force NVN to increase the repair labor force in southern NVN and Laos by about 30 percent, which could easily be drawn from other areas no longer being bombed. The flow of men and supplies would continue. NVN would regard the change in the bombing pattern as a clear victory, evidence that international and domestic pressures on the U.S. were having an effect. It would be encouraged to believe that the U.S. was tiring of the war and being forced to retreat. 10/

Other considerations, however, were dominant in Washington at the highest levels. In mid-January another effort to communicate positions with the DRV had been made and there was an understandable desire to defer escalatory decisions until it had been determined whether some possibility for negotiations existed. 11/ Moreover, the TET holiday at the beginning of February, for which a truce had been announced, made late January an inopportune time to expand the bombing. Thus, on January 28, ROLLING THUNDER program #53 authorized little more than a continuation of strikes within the parameters of previous authorizations. 12/

2. The TET Pause -- 8-14 February

As noted in the previous section of this paper, the Chiefs had recorded their opposition to any truce or military standdown for the holidays in late November. 13/ On January 2, General Westmoreland had strongly recommended against a truce for TET because of the losses to friendly forces during the Christmas and New Year's truces just concluded. 14/

CINCPAC endorsed his opposition to any further truce as did the JCS on January 4. 15/ The Chiefs pointed out that the history of U.S. experience with such holiday suspensions of operations was that the VC/NVA had increasingly exploited them to resupply, prepare for attacks, redeploy forces and commit violations. Perhaps of most concern was the opportunity such standdowns provided the enemy to mount major unharassed logistical resupply operations. Thus, they concluded:

Against this background of persistent exploitation of the standdown periods by the enemy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff view the forthcoming standdown for TET with grave concern. To grant the enemy a respite during a four-day standdown at TET will slow our campaign, allow him time to reconstitute and replenish his forces, and cost us greater casualties in the long run. 16/

This unanimous military opposition was falling on deaf ears. The President and his advisors had already committed the U.S. to a four-day truce and such a belated change of course would have clearly rebounded to the public opinion benefit of the North Vietnamese (who had already, on January 1, announced their intention to observe a 7-day TET truce). Thus, on January 14, Ambassador Lodge was instructed to get the GVN's concurrence to maintain just the 96-hour standdown, but to tell them that the Allies should be prepared to extend the pause if fruitful contacts developed during it. 17/ Lodge replied the following day that the proposal was agreeable to the GVN and to the Allied Chiefs of Mission in Saigon. 18/

Acknowledging the political considerations which required a pause, the Chiefs on January 18 proposed the announcement of a set of conditions to the standdown: (1) that SEA DRAGON countersea infiltration operations continue up to 19°; (2) that CINCPAC be authorized to resume air attacks against major land resupply efforts south of 19°; (3) that operations be resumed in the DMZ area to counter any major resupply or infiltration; and (4) that warning be given that violations or VC/NVA efforts to gain tactical advantage in SVN during the truce, would prompt direct military counteractions. 19/ The reaction at State to these new JCS conditions was vigorous. On January 21, Bundy sent Katzenbach a memo urging him to oppose anything that would compromise our suspension of operations against North Vietnam.

...I strongly recommend against approving JCS proposals for broader military authority to respond to North Vietnamese resupply activities in North Viet-Nam....In my view, resupply activities in North Viet-Nam cannot be considered a sufficiently immediate and direct threat to our forces to justify the great political and psychological disadvantages of U.S. air and naval strikes against North Viet-Namese territory during a truce period. 20/

No information is available on McNamara's reaction to the proposed JCS truce limitations, but on the basis of his general position on the bombing at that time he can be presumed to have opposed them. In any case, they were not adopted. The execute order for the suspension of hostilities authorized CINCPAC strikes only in the case of an immediate and direct threat to U.S. forces, and stipulated that, "In the event reconnaissance disclosed major military resupply activity in North Vietnam south of 19 degrees north latitude, report immediately to the JCS." 21/ Decisions on how and when to respond to such resupply efforts would be made in Washington not Honolulu. This, then, was the issue whose merits would be the focus of debate at the end of the pause when furious diplomatic efforts to get talks started would generate pressure for an extension.

Even before the holiday arrived pressure to extend the pause had begun to mount. On February 2, Leonard Marks, Director of USIA proposed to Rusk that the truce be extended, "in 12 or 24 hour periods contingent upon DRV and VC continued observance of the truce conditions." 22/ The latter included in his definition, "...suspension of all infiltration and movement toward infiltration...." 23/ At the Pentagon, at least within civilian circles, there was sentiment for extending the pause too. In the materials that John McNaughton left behind is a handwritten scenario for the pause with his pencilled changes. The authorship is uncertain since the handwriting is neither McNaughton's nor McNamara's (nor apparently that of any of the other Key Pentagon advisors), but a note in the margin indicates it had been seen and approved by the Secretary. Therefore it is reproduced below. Underlined words or phrases are McNaughton's modifications.

SCENARIO

1. President tell DRV before Tet, "We are stopping bombing at start of Tet and at the end of Tet we will not resume."

2. During Tet and in days thereafter:

- a. Observe DRV/VC conduct for 'signs'.
- b. Try to get talks started.

3. Meantime, avoid changes in 'noise level' in other areas of conduct -- e.g., no large US troop deployments for couple weeks, no dramatic changes in rules of engagement in South, etc.

4. As for public handling:

- a. At end of 4 days of Tet merely extend to 7 days.
- b. At end of 7 days just keep pausing, making make no expansion.
- c. Later say "We are seeing what happens."
- d. Even later, say (if true) infiltration down, etc.

5. If we must resume RT, have reasonable justifications and start in Route packages 1 & 2, working with North as excuses appear (and excuses will appear).

6. If talks start and DRV & they demands ceasefire in South or cessation of US troop additions, consider exact deal then.

7. Accelerate readiness of Project 728. Anti-infiltration barrier.

8. Avoid allowing our terms to harden just because things appear to be going better.

(Vance: How handle case if resupply keeps up during Pause?) 24/

In a puzzling marginal note, McNaughton recorded McNamara's reaction to the scenario: "SecDef (2/3/67: 'Agreed we will do this if answer to note is unproductive' (?). Something like this even if productive. JTM:" 25/ "It is not clear what the Secretary may have had in mind in his reference to a "note." The U.S. had exchanged notes with the DRV through the respective embassies in Moscow in late January and he may have meant this contact. Another possibility is that he was thinking of the letter from the President to Ho that must have been in draft at that time (it was to have been delivered in Moscow on February 7 but actual delivery was not until the 8th). In either case, McNamara must have foreseen this scenario for unilateral extension of the pause based on DRV actions on the ground as an alternative if they formally rejected our demands for reciprocity.

Whatever the explanation, the President's letter to Ho reiterated the demand for reciprocity:

I am prepared to order a cessation of bombing against your country, and the stopping of further augmentation of U.S. forces in South Vietnam as soon as I am assured that infiltration into South Vietnam by land and by sea has stopped. 26/

The President did, however, tie his proposal to the Tet pause and voiced the hope that an answer would be received before the end of Tet that would permit the suspension to continue and peace talks to begin.

Pressures on the President to continue the pause also came from his domestic critics and from the international community. On the very day the pause began, the Pope sent a message to both sides in the conflict expressing his hope that the suspension of hostilities could be extended and open the way to peace. The President's reply was courteous

but firm:

We are prepared to talk at any time and place, in any forum, and with the object of bringing peace to Vietnam; however, I know you would not expect us to reduce military action unless the other side is willing to do likewise. 27/

Meanwhile the possibility that a definitive suspension of the bombing might produce negotiations became increasingly likely. Premier Kosygin had arrived in London to confer with Prime Minister Wilson on February 6, two days before the truce started. They immediately began a frantic weeklong effort to bring the two sides together. Multiple interpretations of position were passed through the intermediaries in London; but in the end, the massive DRV resupply effort forced the U.S. to resume the bombing without having received a final indication from the DRV as to their willingness to show restraint. But this was not before the bombing halt had been extended from 4 to 6 days, and not before the Soviets had informed the DRV of the deadline for an answer.

The factor which took on such importance and eventually forced the President's hand was the unprecedented North Vietnamese resupply activity during the bombing suspension. As already noted, the military had opposed the halt for just this reason and the Christmas and New Year's halts had given warning of what might be expected. By the time the truce had been in effect 24 hours, continuing surveillance had already revealed the massive North Vietnamese effort to move supplies into its southern panhandle. Washington sounded the alarm. On February 9 Rusk held a press conference and warned about the high rate of supply activity. The same day Bundy called Saigon and London with details of the rate of logistical movement and with instructions for dealing with the press. To London he stated:

Ambassador Bruce...should bring this story to the attention of highest British levels urgently, pointing out its relevance both to the problems we face in continuing the Tet bombing suspension and to the wider problem involved in any proposal that we cease bombing in exchange for mere talks. In so doing, you should not repeat nor suggest that we are not still wide open to the idea of continuing the Tet bombing suspension through the 7-day period or at least until Kosygin departs London. You should emphasize, however, that we are seriously concerned about these developments and that final decision on such additional two- or three-day suspension does involve serious factors in light of this information. 28/

On February 10 DIA sent the Secretary a summary of the resupply situation in the first 48-hours of the truce. If the pattern of the first 48 hours continued, the DRV would move some 24,000 tons of materiel southward, the equivalent of 340 division-days of supply. 29/

Thus the pressure on the President to resume mounted. On February 12 when the truce ended, the bombing was not resumed, but no announcement of the fact was made. The DRV were again invited to indicate what reciprocity the U.S. could expect. But no answer was forthcoming. Finally after more hours of anxious waiting by Kosygin and Wilson for a DRV reply, the Soviet Premier left London for home on February 13. The same day, the New York Times carried the latest Harris poll which showed that 67% of the American people supported the bombing. Within hours, the bombing of the North was resumed. The President, in speaking to the press, stressed the unparalleled magnitude of the North Vietnamese logistical effort during the pause as the reason he could no longer maintain the bombing halt. 30/ On February 15, Ho sent the President a stiff letter rejecting U.S. demands for reciprocity and restating the DRV's position that the U.S. must unconditionally halt the bombing before any other issues could be considered. 31/ Thus, the book closed on another effort to bring the conflict to the negotiating table.

B. More Targets

1. The Post-TET Debate

The failure of the Tet diplomatic initiatives once again brought attention back to measures which might put more pressure on the DRV. CINCPAC's January targetting proposals were reactivated for consideration in the week following the resumption of bombing. In early February, before the pause, CINCPAC had added to his requests for additional bombing targets a request for authority to close North Vietnam's ports through aerial mining. Arguing that, "A drastic reduction of external support to the enemy would be a major influence in achieving our objectives....," he suggested that this could be accomplished by denying use of the ports. Three means of closing the ports were considered: (1) naval blockade; (2) air strikes against port facilities; and (3) aerial mining of the approaches. The first was rejected because of the undesirable political ramifications of confrontations with Soviet and third country shipping. But air strikes and mining were recommended as complementary ways of denying use of the ports. Closure of Haiphong alone, it was estimated, would have a dramatic effect because it handled some 95% of North Vietnamese shipping. 32/ In a related development, the JCS, on February 2, gave their endorsement to mining certain inland waterways including the Kien Giang River and its seaward approaches. 33/

In the week following the Tet pause the range of possible escalatory actions came under full review. The President apparently requested a listing of options for his consideration, because on February 21, Cyrus Vance, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, forwarded a package of proposals to Under Secretary Katzenbach at State for comment. Vance's letter stated, "The President wants the paper for his night reading tonight." 34/ The paper Vance transmitted gives every indication of having been written by McNaughton, although that cannot be verified. In any case, it began with the following outline "shopping list" of possible actions with three alternative JCS packages indicated:

21 Feb 67

JCS Program

OUTLINE

A B C

Page

			1. Military actions against North Vietnam and in Laos	
			A. Present program	1
			B. Options for increased military programs	2
			1. Destroy modern industry	3
X	X	X	- Thermal power (7-plant grid)	
X	X	X	- Steel and cement	
	X	X	- Machine tool plant	
			- Other	
		X	2. Destroy dikes and levees	6
			3. Mine ports and coastal waters	7
	X	X	- Mine estuaries south of 20°	
		X	- Mine major ports and approaches, and estuaries north of 20°	
			4. Unrestricted LOC attacks	10
X	X	X	- Eliminate 10-mile Hanoi prohibited area	
	X	X	- Reduce Haiphong restricted area to 4 miles	
		X	- Eliminate prohibited/restricted areas except Chicom zone	
	X	X	- Elements of 3 ports (Haiphong, Cam Pha and Hon Gai)	
		X	- 4 ports (Haiphong, Cam Pha, Hon Gai and Hanoi Port)	
	X	X	- Selected rail facilities	
	X	X	- Mine inland waterways south of 20°	
		X	- Mine inland waterways north of 20°	
	X	X	- 7 locks	
			5. Expand naval surface operations	12
X	X	X	- Fire at targets ashore and afloat south of 19°	
	X	X	- Expand to 20°	
		X	- Expand north of 20° to Chicom buffer zone	
			6. Destroy MIG airfields	14
X	X	X	- All unoccupied airfields	
	X	X	- 4 not used for international civil transportation	
		X	- 2 remaining airfields (Phuc Yen and Gia Lam)	
			7. SHINING BRASS ground operations in Laos	15
X	X	X	- Delegate State/DOD authority to CINCPAC/Vientiane	
	X	X	- Expand operational limits to 20 km into Laos, increase helo operations, authorize larger forces, increase frequency of operation	
		X	- Battalion-size forces; start guerrilla warfare	
X	X	X	8. Cause interdicting rains in or near Laos	16
			9. Miscellaneous	
X	X	X	- Base part of B-52 operations at U-Tapao, Thailand	
X	X	X	- Fire artillery from SVN against DMZ and north of DMZ	
	X	X	- Fire artillery from SVN against targets in Laos	
	X	X	- Ammunition dump 4 miles SW of Haiphong	
		X	- Air defense HQ and Ministry of Defense HQ in Hanoi	
			II. Actions in South Vietnam	
			A. Expand US forces and/or their role	17
			- Continue current force build-up	
X	X	X	- Accelerate current build-up (deploying 3 Army bns in 6/67)	
	X	X	- Deploy Marine brigade from Okinawa/Japan in 3/67	
		X	- Deploy up to 4 divisions and up to 9 air squadrons	
			B. Improve pacification	18

The discussion section of the paper dealt with each of the eight specific option areas noting our capability in each instance to inflict heavy damage or complete destruction to the facilities in question. The important conclusion in each instance was that elimination of the targets, individually or collectively, could not sufficiently reduce the flow of men and materiel to the South to undercut the Communist forces fighting the war. The inescapable fact which forced this conclusion was that North Vietnam's import potential far exceeded its requirements and could sustain considerable contraction without impairing the war effort. The point was dramatically made in the following table:

When Option 4 is taken together with Options 1-3, the import and need figures appear as follows:

NORTH VIETNAM'S POTENTIAL FOR OBTAINING
IMPORTS BEFORE AND AFTER U.S. ATTACK
(tons per day)

	<u>Potential Now</u>	<u>Potential After Attack</u>
By sea	6,500	650
By Red River from China	1,500	150
By road from China	3,200	2,400
By rail from China	<u>6,000</u>	<u>4,000</u>
TOTAL	17,200	7,200

Without major hardship, the need for imports is as follows (tons per day):

Normal imports	4,200
If imports replace destroyed industrial production	1,400
If imports replace rice destroyed by levee breaks	<u>600-2,500</u>

TOTAL 6,200-8,100 35/

With respect to crippling Hanoi's will to continue the war, the paper stated:

Unless things were going very badly for them there [in the South], it is likely that the North Vietnamese would decide to continue the war despite their concern over the increasing destruction of their country, the effect of this on their people, and their increasing apprehension that the US would invade the North. 36/

The expected reaction of the Soviet Union and China to these escalatory options varied, but none was judged as unacceptable except in the case of mining the harbors. Here the Soviet Union would be faced with a difficult problem. The paper judged the likely Soviet reaction this way:

....To the USSR, the mining of the ports would be particularly challenging. Last year they moved some 530,000 tons of goods to North Vietnam by sea. If the ports remained closed, almost all of their deliveries -- military and civilian -- would be at the sufferance of Peiping, with whom they are having increasing difficulties. They would be severely embarrassed by their inability to prevent or counter the US move. It is an open question whether they would be willing to take the risks involved in committing their own ships and aircraft to an effort to reopen the ports.

In these circumstances, the Soviets would at least send a token number of "volunteers" to North Vietnam if Hanoi asked for them, and would provide Hanoi with new forms of military assistance -- e.g., floating mines and probably cruise missiles (land-based or on Komar boats), which could appear as a direct response to the US mining and which would endanger our ships in the area.

The Soviets would be likely to strike back at the US in their bilateral relations, severely reducing what remains of normal contacts on other issues. They would focus their propaganda and diplomatic campaign to get US allies in Europe to repudiate the US action. They would probably also make other tension-promoting gestures, such as pressure in Berlin. The situation could of course become explosive if the mining operations resulted in serious damage to a Soviet ship. 37/

This confirmed Ambassador Thompson's judgment of a few days before, ~~that the~~

Mining of Haiphong Harbor would provoke a strong reaction here and Soviets would certainly relate it to their relations with China....They would consider that we are quite willing to make North Vietnam entirely dependent upon CHINCOMs with all which that would imply. 38/

Thus, while considering a long list of possible escalations, it did not offer forceful arguments for any of them. The copy preserved in McNaughton's materials contains a final section entitled "Ways to Advance a Settlement." A pencil note, however, indicates that this section was not sent to State and presumably not to the President either.

At State, Bundy drafted some comments on the OSD paper which generally supported its analysis. With respect to the proposals for mining North Vietnamese waters, however, it made a significant distinction:

...we would be inclined to separate the mining of ports used by Soviet shipping from the mining of coastal waters where (we believe) most of the shipping, if not all, is North Vietnamese. Mining of the waterways would have a more limited effect on Hanoi will and capacity, but would also be much less disturbing to the Soviets and much less likely to throw Hanoi into the arms of China, or to induce the Soviets to cooperate more fully with the Chinese. 39/

The distinction is important because the President the next day did in fact approve the limited mining of internal waterways but deferred any decision on mining the ports. Beyond this, Bundy sought to reinforce the undesirability of striking the sensitive dyke and levee system and to emphasize that the Chinese buffer zone was a more important sanctuary (from the point of view of likely Soviet and/or Chinese reactions) than the Hanoi-Haiphong perimeters. 40/

Several other memos of the same period appear in the files, but it is unlikely they had any influence on the new targets the President was considering. Roger Fisher had sent McNaughton another of his periodic notes on "future Strategy." After rehearsing the failures of the bombing program he suggested that "...all northern bombing be restricted to a narrower and narrower belt across the southern part of North Vietnam until it merges into air support for an on-the-ground interdiction barrier." 41/ By thus concentrating and intensifying our interdiction efforts he hoped we might finally be able to choke off the flow of men and goods to the South.

A memo from the President's special military advisor, General Maxwell Taylor, on February 20 considered some of the difficulties of negotiations, in particular the sequence in which we should seek to arrange a ceasefire and a political settlement. He argued that it was in the U.S. interest to adopt a "fight and talk" strategy, in which the political issues were settled first and the cease-fire arranged afterwards, hopefully conducting the actual negotiations in secret while we continued to vigorously press the VC/NVA in combat. 42/ The President passed the memo on to the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Chairman of the JCS for their comment but since the question of negotiations was for the moment academic it probably had no bearing on the next bombing decisions. 43/

2. A "Little" Escalation

The President approved only a limited number of the measures presented to him, by and large those that would incur little risk of

counter-escalation. He authorized naval gunfire up to the 20th parallel against targets ashore and afloat, artillery fire across the DMZ, a slight expansion of operation in Laos, the mining of rivers and estuaries south of 20°, and new bombing targets for ROLLING THUNDER 54. The latter included the remaining thermal power plants except Hanoi and Haiphong, and a reiteration of authority to strike the Thai Nguyen Steel Plant and the Haiphong Cement Plant (initially given in RT 53 but targets not struck). 44/ The President was neither ready nor willing, however, to consider the mining of the ports nor, for the moment, the removal of the Hanoi sanctuary. A decision on basing B-52s in Thailand was also deferred for the time being.

CINCPAC promptly took steps to bring the newly authorized targets under attack. On February 24 U.S. artillery units along the DMZ began shelling north of the buffer with long-range 175mm. cannon. The same day the Secretary told a news conference that more targets in the North might be added to the strike list, thereby preparing the public for the modest escalation approved by the President two days before. On February 27 U.S. planes began the aerial mining of the rivers and coastal estuaries of North Vietnam below the 20th parallel. The mines were equipped with de-activation devices to neutralize them at the end of three months. Weather conditions, however, continued to hamper operations over North Vietnam and to defer sorties from several of the authorized targets that required visual identification weather conditions before strike approval could be given. The Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel complex, for example, was not struck until March 10. The slow squeeze was once more the order of the day with the emphasis on progressively destroying North Vietnam's embryonic industrial capability.

But the President intended that the pressure on the North be slowly increased to demonstrate the firmness of our resolve. Thus William Bundy in Saigon in early March told Thieu on behalf of the President that:

GVN should have no doubt that President adhered to basic position he had stated at Manila, that pressure must continue to be applied before Hanoi could be expected to change its attitude, while at the same time we remained completely alert for any indication of change in Hanoi's position. It was now clear from December and January events that Hanoi was negative for the time being, so that we were proceeding with continued and somewhat increased pressures including additional measures against the North.

The President perceived the strikes as necessary in the psychological test of wills between the two sides to punish the North, in spite of the near-consensus opinion of his advisers that no level of damage or destruction that we were willing to inflict was likely to destroy Hanoi's

determination to continue the struggle. In a March 1st letter to Senator Jackson (who had publicly called for more bombing on February 27) he pointed to the DRV's violation of the two Geneva Agreements of 1954 and 1962 as the reason for the bombing, its specific purposes being:

...first...to back our fighting men and our fighting allies by demonstrating that the aggressor could not illegally bring hostile arms and men to bear against them from the security of a sanctuary.

Second...to impose on North Viet-Nam a cost for violating its international agreements.

Third...to limit or raise the cost of bringing men and supplies to bear against the South. 46/

The formulation of objectives for the bombing was almost identical two weeks later when he spoke to the Tennessee State Legislature:

- To back our fighting men by denying the enemy a sanctuary;
- To exact a penalty against North Vietnam for her flagrant violations of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962;
- To limit the flow, or to substantially increase the cost of infiltration of men and materiel from North Vietnam. 47/

In both instances the President put the psychological role of the bombing ahead of its interdiction functions. There was little evidence to suggest, however, that Hanoi was feeling these pressures in the way in which Mr. Johnson intended them.

3. The Guam Conference and More Salami Slices

Sometime early in March the President decided to arrange a high level conference to introduce his new team for Vietnam (Ambassadors Bunker and Komer, General Abrams, et al.) to the men they were to replace and to provide them comprehensive briefings on the problems they would face. Later it was decided to invite Thieu and Ky to the conference as well. The conference was scheduled for March 20-21 on Guam and the President led a large high-level delegation from Washington. Two important events occurred just before the group gathered and in large degree provided the backdrop if not the entire subject matter of their deliberations. First, the South Vietnamese Constituent Assembly completed its work on a draft constitution on March 18 and Thieu and Ky proudly brought the document with them to present to the President for his endorsement. 48/ Not surprisingly the great portion of the conference was given over to discussions about the forthcoming electoral process envisaged in the new constitution through which legitimate government would once again be

restored to South Vietnam. The second significant development also occurred on the 18th when General Westmoreland sent CINCPAC a long cable requesting additional forces. 49/ His request amounted to little more than a restatement of the force requirements that had been rejected in November 1966 when Program #4 was approved. The proposal must have hung over the conference and been discussed during it by the Principals even though no time had been available before their departure for a detailed analysis.

The bombing program and the progress of the anti-infiltration barrier were also items on the Guam agenda but did not occupy much time since other questions were more pressing. Some handwritten "press suggestions" which McNaughton prepared for McNamara reflect the prevalent Guam concern with the war in the South. McNaughton's first point (originally numbered #4 but renumbered 1 in red pen) was, "Constant Strategy: A. Destroy Main Forces B. Provide Security C. Improve lot of people D. Press NVN (RT) E. Settle." 50/ As if to emphasize the preoccupation with the war in the South, the Joint Communique made no mention of the air war. But, if ROLLING THUNDER was only fourth priority in our "Constant Strategy," the Guam Conference nevertheless produced approval for two significant new targets -- the Haiphong thermal power plants. They were added to the authorized targets of RT 54 on March 22. A related action also announced on March 22 after discussion and Presidential approval at Guam was the decision to assign B-52s conducting ARC LIGHT strikes in North and South Vietnam to bases in Thailand as the JCS had long been recommending. Slowly the air war was inching its way up the escalatory ladder:

During the Guam Conference one of the more unusual, unexpected and inexplicable developments of the entire Vietnam war occurred. Hanoi, for reasons still unclear, decided to make public the exchange of letters between President Johnson and Ho during the Tet truce. The North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry released the texts of the two letters to the press on March 21 while the President, his advisers and the South Vietnamese leadership were all closeted in Guam reviewing the progress of the war. Hanoi must have calculated that it would embarrass the President, make the South Vietnamese suspicious of U.S. intentions, and enhance their own peaceful image. By admitting past contacts with the U.S., however, the DRV assumed some of the direct responsibility for the failure of peace efforts. Moreover, the President's letter was conciliatory and forthcoming whereas Ho's was cold and uncompromising. In any case, the disclosure did the President no real harm with public opinion, a miscalculation which must have disappointed Hanoi greatly. After their return to Washington McNaughton sent McNamara a memo with some State Department observations on other aspects of the disclosure:

Bill Bundy's experts read this into Ho Chi Minh's release of the Johnson-Ho exchange of letters: (a) Ho thereby "played the world harp," thereby "losing" in the Anglo-Saxon world; (b) to Ho's Hanoi public, he "told off the Americans," showing the hard line but simultaneously reiterating the Burchette line (which China did not like); (c) in the process of quoting the President's letter, Ho leaked the fact of previous exchanges, thereby admitting past contacts and preparing the public for future ones; and (d) Ho ignored the MLF. 51/

The most immediate and obvious effect of the disclosure, however, was to throw cold water on any hopes for an early break in the Washington-Hanoi deadlock.

Shortly after the President's return from the Pacific he received a memo from the Chairman of the JCS, General Wheeler, describing the current status of targets authorized under ROLLING THUNDER 54. While most of the targets authorized had been struck, including the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel plant and its associated thermal power facility, bad weather was preventing the kind of sustained campaign against the approved industrial targets that the JCS would have liked. 52/ The Thai Nguyen complex, for instance, had been scheduled for attack 51 times by March 21, but only 4 of these could be carried out, the rest being cancelled because of adverse weather. Piecemeal additions to the authorized target list continued through the month of April. On April 8, ROLLING THUNDER program 55 was approved, adding the Kep airfield; the Hanoi power transformer near the center of town; and the Haiphong cement plant, POL storage, and ammunition dump to the target list along with more bridges, railroad yards and vehicle parts elsewhere in the country. 53/ The restrictions on the Hanoi and Haiphong perimeters were relaxed to permit the destruction of these new targets.

In spite of the approval of these new "high-value" industrial targets that the JCS and CINCPAC had lusted after for so long, the Chairman in his monthly progress report to the President in April could report little progress. Unusually bad weather conditions had forced the cancellation of large numbers of sorties and most of the targets had been struck insufficiently or not at all.

In addition to broadening the NVN target base, increased pressure must be attained by achieving greater effectiveness in destruction of targets, maintaining continuous harassment during periods of darkness and marginal attack weather, and generating surge strike capabilities during periods of visual attack conditions. In view of the increased hostility of NVN air environment, achievement of around-the-clock strike capability is imperative to effect maximum possible degradation of the NVN air defense system which, in turn, will

increase over-all attack effectiveness. As radar bombing/
pathfinder capabilities are expanded and techniques per-
fected, the opportunity to employ additional strike
forces effectively in sustained operations will improve
significantly. 55/

These problems did not deter them from recommending the approval of three additional tactical fighter squadrons (to be based at Nam Phong, Thailand) for the war in the North. 56/ The concept of operations under which these and other CINCPAC assigned aircraft were to operate was little more than a restatement of the goals set down the previous fall. The purpose was; "To make it as difficult and costly as possible for NVN to continue effective support of the VC and to cause NVN to cease direction of the VC insurgency." 57/ As usual, however, there was no effort to relate requested forces to the achievement of the desired goals, which were to stand throughout the war as wishes not objectives against which one effectively programmed forces.

On the same day the JCS endorsed Westy's force proposals CINCPAC's planes finally broke through the cloud cover and attacked the two thermal power generating facilities in Haiphong. The raids made world headlines. Two days later the specific go-ahead was given from Washington for strikes on the MIG airfields and on April 24th they too came under attack. At this point, with the JCS endorsement of Westmoreland's troop requests, a major debate over future Vietnam policy, in all its aspects, began within the Johnson Administration. It would continue through the month of May and into June, not finally being resolved until after McNamara's trip to Vietnam in July and the Presidential decisions on Program #5. But even while this major policy review was gearing up, the impetus for the salami-slice escalation of our assault on North Vietnam's industrial base produced yet another ROLLING THUNDER program. RT 56, whose principle new target was the thermal power plant located only 1 mile north of the center of Hanoi, became operational May 2. On May 5, at McNamara's request, General Wheeler sent the President a memo outlining the rationale behind the attack on the entire North Vietnamese power grid. In his words,

As you know, the objective of our air attacks on the thermal electric power system in North Vietnam was not...to turn the lights off in major population centers, but were [sic] designed to deprive the enemy of a basic power source needed to operate certain war supporting facilities and industries. You will recall that nine thermal power plants were tied together, principally through the Hanoi Transformer Station, in an electric power grid in the industrial and population complex in northeastern North Vietnam....These nine thermal power plants provided electric power needed to operate a cement plant, a steel plant, a chemical plant, a fertilizer plant, a machine tool plant, an explosives plant, a textile plant, the ports of Haiphong and Hon Gai, major military installations such as airfields, etc. The power grid

referred to above tied in the nine individual thermal electric power plants and permitted the North Vietnamese to switch kilowattage as required among the several consumers. All of the factories and facilities listed above contribute in one way or another and in varying degrees to the war effort in North Vietnam. For example, the steel plant fabricated POL tanks to supplement or replace fixed POL storage, metal pontoons for the construction of floating bridges, metal barges to augment infiltration capacity, etc.; the cement plant produced some 600,000 metric tons of cement annually which has been used in the rehabilitation of lines of communication. 58/

Wheeler went on to describe the "specific military benefits" derived from the attacks on the two Haiphong power plants,

The two power plants in Haiphong had a total capacity of 17,000 kilowatts, some 9 per cent of the pre-strike national electric power capacity. Between them they supplied power for the cement plant, a chemical plant, Kien An airfield, Cat Bi airfield, the naval base and repair facilities, the Haiphong shipyard repair facilities and the electric power to operate the equipment in the port itself. In addition, the electric power generated by these two plants could be diverted through the electric grid, mentioned above, to other metropolitan and industrial areas through the Hanoi transformer station. All of the aforementioned industrial, repair, airbase, and port facilities contribute to the North Vietnamese war effort and, in their totality, this support is substantial. 59/

Striking the newly approved Hanoi power plant would derive the following additional military advantages, Wheeler argued:

The Hanoi Thermal Power Plant has a 32,500 kilowatt capacity comprising 17 per cent of the pre-strike electric power production. Major facilities which would be affected by its destruction are the Hanoi Fort Facility, the Hanoi Supply Depot, a machine tool plant, a rubber plant, a lead battery plant, the Van Dien Vehicle Repair Depot, an international telecommunications site, an international radio transmitter receiver site, the Bac Mai airfield, and the national military defense command center. All of these facilities contribute substantially to the North Vietnamese war effort. In addition, it should be noted a 35-kilovolt direct transmission line runs from the Hanoi Thermal Power Plant to Haiphong and Nam Dinh. We believe that, since the two Haiphong Thermal

Power Plants were damaged, the Hanoi Thermal Power Plant has been supplying 3,000 kilowatts of power to Haiphong over this direct transmission line; this quantity is sufficient to meet about 10 per cent of Haiphong's electric power requirements. 59a/

Exactly how reassuring this line of argument was to the President is impossible to say. In any case, the long-awaited attack on the Hanoi power facility was finally given the operational go-ahead on May 16, and on May 19 the strike took place. When it did the cries of civilian casualties were again heard long and loud from Hanoi. But the Hanoi power plant was the last major target of the U.S. "spring offensive" against North Vietnam's nascent industrial sector. The CIA on May 26 produced a highly favorable report on the effectiveness of the campaign against the DRV's electric power capacity. In summary it stated:

Air strikes through 25 May 1967 against 14 of the 20 JCS-targeted electric power facilities in North Vietnam have put out of operation about 165,000 kilowatts (kw) of power generating capacity or 87 percent of the national total. North Vietnam is now left with less than 24,000 kw of central power generating capacity.

Both Hanoi and Haiphong are now without a central power supply and must rely on diesel-generating equipment as a power source. The reported reserve power system in Hanoi consisting of five underground diesel stations has an estimated power generating capacity of only 5,000 kw, or less than ten percent of Hanoi's normal needs. 60/

The last phases of this attack on the North's electric power generating system in May 1967 were being carried out against a backdrop of very high level deliberations in Washington on the future course of U.S. strategy in the war. They both influenced and were in turn influenced by the course of that debate, which is the subject of the next section of this paper. The fact that this major assault on the modern sector of the North Vietnamese economy while highly successful in pure target-destruction terms, had failed to alter Hanoi's determined pursuit of the war would bear heavily on the consideration by the Principles of new directions for American policy.

C. The Question Again -- Escalate or Negotiate?

1. Two Courses - Escalate or Level Off

As already discussed, the JCS had transmitted to the Secretary of Defense on April 20 their endorsement of General Westmoreland's March troop requests (100,000 immediately and 200,000 eventually). In so doing the military had once again confronted the Johnson Administration with a difficult decision on whether to escalate or level-off the U.S. effort. What they proposed was the mobilization of the Reserves, a major new troop commitment in the South, an extension of the war into the VC/EVA sanctuaries (Laos, Cambodia, and possibly North Vietnam), the mining of North Vietnamese ports and a solid commitment in manpower and resources to a military victory. 61/ The recommendation not unsurprisingly touched off a searching reappraisal of the course of U.S. strategy in the war.

Under Secretary Katzenbach opened the review on May 24 in a memo to John McNaughton in which he outlined the problem and assigned the preparation of various policy papers to Defense, CIA, State and the White House. As Katzenbach saw it,

Fundamentally, there are three jobs which have to be done:

1. Assess the current situation in Viet-Nam and the various political and military actions which could be taken to bring this to a successful conclusion;
2. Review the possibilities for negotiation, including an assessment of the ultimate U.S. position in relationship to the DRV and NLF; and
3. Assess the military and political effects of intensification of the war in South Vietnam and in North Viet-Nam. 62/

Katzenbach's memo asked Defense to consider two alternative courses of action: course A, the kind of escalation the military proposed including the 200,000 new troops; and course B, the leveling-off of the U.S. troop commitment with an addition of no more than 10,000 new men. Bombing strategies in the North to correlate with each course were also to be considered. Significantly, a territorially limited bombing halt was suggested as a possibility for the first time.

Consider with Course B, for example, a cessation, after the current targets have been struck, of bombing North Vietnamese areas north of 20° (or, if it looked sufficiently important to maximize an attractive settlement opportunity, cessation of bombing in all of North Viet-Nam.) 63/

The White House was assigned a paper on the prospects and possibilities in the pacification program. State was to prepare a paper on U.S. settlement terms and conditions, and the CIA was to produce its usual estimate of the current situation.

With respect to the air war, the CIA had already to some extent anticipated the alternatives in a limited distribution memo in mid-April. 64/ Their judgment was that Hanoi was taking a harder line since the publication of the Johnson-Ho letters in March and would continue the armed struggle vigorously in the next phase waiting for a better negotiating opportunity. Three bombing programs were considered by the CIA. The first was an intensified program against military, industrial and LOC targets. Their estimate was that while such a course would create serious problems for the DRV the minimum essential flow of supplies into the North and on to the South would continue. No great change in Chinese or Soviet policies was anticipated from such a course of action. By adding the mining of the ports to this intensified air campaign, Hanoi's ability to support the war would be directly threatened. This would confront the Soviet Union with difficult choices, although the CIA expected that in the end the Soviets would avoid a direct confrontation with the U.S. and would simply step up their support through China. Mining of the ports would put China in "...a commanding political position, since it would have control over the only remaining supply lines to North Vietnam." 65/ If the mining were construed by Hanoi and/or Peking as the prelude to an invasion of the North, Chinese combat troops could be expected to move into North Vietnam to safeguard China's strategic southern frontier. As to the Hanoi leadership, the CIA analysis did not foresee their capitulating on their goals in the South even in the face of the closing of their ports. A third possibility, attacking the airfields, was expected to produce no major Soviet response and at most only the transfer of some North Vietnamese fighters to Chinese bases and the possible entry of Chinese planes into the air war.

With a full-scale debate of future strategy in the offing, Robert Komer decided to leave behind his own views on the best course for U.S. policy before he went to Saigon to become head of CORDS. Questioning whether stepped up bombing or more troops were likely to produce the desired results, Komer identified what he felt were the "Critical Variables Which Will Determine Success in Vietnam." 66/ He outlined them as follows:

A. It is Unlikely that Hanoi will Negotiate. We can't count on a negotiated compromise. Perhaps the NLF would prove more flexible, but it seems increasingly under the thumb of Hanoi.

B. More Bombing or Mining Would Raise the Pain Level but Probably Wouldn't Force Hanoi to Cry Uncle. I'm no expert on this, but can't see it as decisive. Could it

prevent Hanoi from maintaining substantial infiltration if it chose? Moreover, some facets of it contain dangerous risks.

C. Thus the Critical Variable is in the South! The greatest opportunity for decisive gains in the next 12-18 months lies in accelerating the erosion of the VC in South Vietnam, and in building a viable alternative with attractive power. Let's assume that the NVA could replace its losses. I doubt that the VC could. They are now the "weak sisters" of the enemy team. The evidence is not conclusive, but certainly points in this direction. Indeed, the NVA strategy in I Corps seems designed to take pressure off the VC in the South. 67/

This was the first time that Komer, whose preoccupation was pacification, had seriously questioned the utility of more bombing. Apparently the McNamara analysis was reaching even the more determined members of the White House staff.

A different view of the bombing was presented to the President, however, by General Westmoreland on April 27. He had returned from Vietnam to argue in favor of his troop requests and for a considerable expansion of the war, as well as to appear before Congress and in public to strengthen support for the President's war policy. In his conversation with the President on the 27th he stated, "I am frankly dismayed at even the thought of stopping the bombing program." 68/ General Wheeler in the same conversation, however, went even farther, taking the initiative to urge the closing of the ports as the next logical step against the DRV. But in addition he suggested that U.S. troops be authorized to extend the war into the Laotian and Cambodian sanctuaries and that we consider the "possible invasion of North Vietnam. We may wish to take offensive action against the DRV with ground troops." 69/ The President remained skeptical to say the least. When Westmoreland spoke to Congress the following day he mentioned the bombing only in passing as a reprisal for VC terror and depredation in the South.

Meanwhile, the Principles continued their deliberations. They met on May 1 although there is no record of what transpired in their discussions. The only available paper for the meeting is one that Bill Bundy wrote for Secretary Katzenbach. Bundy's paper offered a fairly optimistic view of the overall prospects for the coming six months:

Over-All Estimate. If we go on as we are doing, if the political process in the South comes off well, and if the Chinese do not settle down, I myself would reckon that by the end of 1967 there is at least a 50-50 chance that a favorable tide will be running really strongly in the South, and that Hanoi will be very discouraged.

Whether they will move to negotiate is of course a slightly different question, but we could be visibly and strongly on the way.

If China should go into a real convulsion, I would raise these odds slightly, and think it clearly more likely that Hanoi would choose a negotiating path to the conclusion. 70/

Much of Bundy's sanguine optimism was based on the convulsions going on in China. He estimated that the odds for another significant Chinese internal upheaval were at least 50-50, and that this would offset Hanoi's recent promise of additional aid from the Soviets. He argued that it should be the principle factor in the consideration of any additional step-up in the bombing, or the mining of Haiphong harbor. Specifically, he gave the following objections to more bombing:

Additional Action in the North. Of the major targets still not hit, I would agree to the Hanoi power station, but then let it go at that, subject only to occasional re-strikes where absolutely required. In particular, on the airfields, I think we have gone far enough to hurt and not far enough to drive the aircraft to Chinese fields, which I think could be very dangerous.

I would strongly oppose the mining of Haiphong at any time in the next nine months, unless the Soviets categorically use it to send in combat weapons. (It may well be that we should warn them quietly but firmly that we are watching their traffic into Haiphong very closely, and particularly from this standpoint.) Mining of Haiphong, at any time, is bound to risk a confrontation with the Soviets and to throw Hanoi into greater dependence on Communist China. These in themselves would be very dangerous and adverse to the whole notion of getting Hanoi to change its attitude. Moreover, I think they would somehow manage to get the stuff in through China no matter what we did to Haiphong. 71/

In addition to these considerations, however, Bundy was worried about the international implications of more bombing:

International Factors. My negative feeling on serious additional bombing of the North and mining of Haiphong is based essentially on the belief that these actions will not change Hanoi's position, or affect Hanoi's capabilities in ways that counter-balance the risks and adverse reaction in China and with the Soviets alone.

Nonetheless, I cannot leave out the wider international factors, and particularly the British and Japanese as bellwethers. Both the latter have accepted our recent bombings with much less outcry than I, frankly, would have anticipated. But if we keep it up at this pace, or step up the pace, I doubt if the British front will hold. Certainly we will be in a very bad Donnybrook next fall in the UN.

Whatever the wider implications of negative reactions on a major scale, the main point is that they would undoubtedly stiffen Hanoi, and this is always the gut question. 72/

With respect to negotiations, Bundy was guarded. He did not expect any serious moves by the other side until after the elections in South Vietnam in September. Thus, he argued against any new U.S. initiatives and in favor of conveying an impression of "steady firmness" on our part. It was precisely this impression that had been lacking from our behavior since the previous winter and that we should now seek to restore. This was the main point of his overall assessment of the situation, as the following summary paragraph demonstrates:

A Steady, Firm Course. Since roughly the first of December, I think we have given a very jerky and impatient impression to Hanoi. This is related more to the timing and suddenness of our bombing and negotiating actions than to the substance of what we have done. I think that Hanoi in any event believes that the 1968 elections could cause us to change our position or even lose heart completely. Our actions since early December may well have encouraged and greatly strengthened this belief that we wish to get the war over by 1968 at all costs. Our major thrust must be now to persuade them that we are prepared to stick it if necessary. This means a steady and considered program of action for the next nine months. 73/

An SNIE a few days later confirmed Bundy's views about the unlikelihood of positive Soviet efforts to bring the conflict to the negotiating table. It also affirmed that the Soviets would no doubt continue and increase their assistance to North Vietnam and that the Chinese would probably not impede the flow of material across its territory. 74/

Powerful and unexpected support for William Bundy's general viewpoint came at about this time from his brother, the former Presidential adviser to Kennedy and Johnson, McGeorge Bundy. In an unsolicited letter

to the President he outlined his current views as to further escalation of the air war (in the initiation of which he had had a large hand in 1965) and further troop increments for the ground war in the South:

Since the Communist turndown of our latest offers in February, there has been an intensification of bombing in the North, and press reports suggest that there will be further pressure for more attacks on targets heretofore immune. There is also obvious pressure from the military for further reinforcements in the South, although General Westmoreland has been a model of discipline in his public pronouncements. One may guess, therefore, that the President will soon be confronted with requests for 100,000-200,000 more troops and for authority to close the harbor in Haiphong. Such recommendations are inevitable, in the framework of strictly military analysis. It is the thesis of this paper that in the main they should be rejected, and that as a matter of high national policy there should be a publicly stated ceiling to the level of American participation in Vietnam, as long as there is no further marked escalation on the enemy side.

There are two major reasons for this recommendation: the situation in Vietnam and the situation in the United States. As to Vietnam, it seems very doubtful that further intensifications of bombing in the North or major increases in U.S. troops in the South are really a good way of bringing the war to a satisfactory conclusion. As to the United States, it seems clear that uncertainty about the future size of the war is now having destructive effects on the national will. 75/

Unlike the vocal critics of the Administration, Mac Bundy was not opposed to the bombing per se, merely to any further extension of it since he felt such action would be counter-productive. Because his views carry such weight, his arguments against extending the bombing are reproduced below in full:

On the ineffectiveness of the bombing as a means to end the war, I think the evidence is plain -- though I would defer to expert estimators. Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues simply are not going to change their policy on the basis of losses from the air in North Vietnam. No intelligence estimate that I have seen in the last two years has ever claimed that the bombing would have this effect. The President never claimed that it would. The notion that this was its purpose has been limited to one school of thought and has never been the official Government position, whatever critics may assert.

I am very far indeed from suggesting that it would make sense now to stop the bombing of the North altogether. The argument for that course seems to me wholly unpersuasive at the present. To stop the bombing today would be to give the Communists something for nothing, and in a very short time all the doves in this country and around the world would be asking for some further unilateral concessions. (Doves and hawks are alike in their insatiable appetites; we can't really keep the hawks happy by small increases in effort -- they come right back for more.)

The real justification for the bombing, from the start, has been double -- its value for Southern morale at a moment of great danger, and its relation to Northern infiltration. The first reason has disappeared but the second remains entirely legitimate. Tactical bombing of communications and of troop concentrations -- and of airfields as necessary -- seems to me sensible and practical. It is strategic bombing that seems both unproductive and unwise. It is true, of course, that all careful bombing does some damage to the enemy. But the net effect of this damage upon the military capability of a primitive country is almost sure to be slight. (The lights have not stayed off in Haiphong, and even if they had, electric lights are in no sense essential to the Communist war effort.) And against this distinctly marginal impact we have to weigh the fact that strategic bombing does tend to divide the U.S., to distract us all from the real struggle in the South, and to accentuate the unease and distemper which surround the war in Vietnam, both at home and abroad. It is true that careful polls show majority support for the bombing, but I believe this support rests upon an erroneous belief in its effectiveness as a means to end the war. Moreover, I think those against extension of the bombing are more passionate on balance than those who favor it. Finally, there is certainly a point at which such bombing does increase the risk of conflict with China or the Soviet Union, and I am sure there is no majority for that. In particular, I think it clear that the case against going after Haiphong Harbor is so strong that a majority would back the Government in rejecting that course.

So I think that with careful explanation there would be more approval than disapproval of an announced policy restricting the bombing closely to activities that support the war in the South. General Westmoreland's speech to the Congress made this tie-in, but attacks on power plants really do not fit the picture very well. We are attacking them, I fear, mainly because we have "run out" of other targets. Is it a very good reason? Can anyone demonstrate that such targets have been very rewarding? Remembering the claims made for attacks on oil supplies, should we not be very skeptical of new promises? 76/

In a similar fashion Bundy developed his arguments against a major increase in U.S. troop strength in the South and urged the President not to take any new diplomatic initiatives for the present. But the appeal of Bundy's analysis for the President must surely have been its finale in which Bundy, acutely aware of the President's political sensitivities, cast his arguments in the context of the forthcoming 1968 Presidential elections. Here is how he presented the case:

There is one further argument against major escalation in 1967 and 1968 which is worth stating separately, because on the surface it seems cynically political. It is that Hanoi is going to do everything it possibly can to keep its position intact until after our 1968 elections. Given their history, they are bound to hold out for a possible U.S. shift in 1969 -- that's what they did against the French, and they got most of what they wanted when Mendes took power. Having held on so long this time, and having nothing much left to lose -- compared to the chance of victory -- they are bound to keep on fighting. Since only atomic bombs could really knock them out (an invasion of North Vietnam would not do it in two years, and is of course ruled out on other grounds), they have it in their power to "prove" that military escalation does not bring peace -- at least over the next two years.. They will surely do just that. However much they may be hurting, they are not going to do us any favors before November 1968. (And since this was drafted, they have been publicly advised by Walter Lippmann to wait for the Republicans -- as if they needed the advice and as if it was his place to give it!)

It follows that escalation will not bring visible victory over Hanoi before the election. Therefore the election will have to be fought by the Administration on other grounds. I think those other grounds are clear and important, and that they will be obscured if our policy is thought to be one of increasing -- and ineffective -- military pressure.

~~If we assume that the war will still be going on in~~ November 1968, and that Hanoi will not give us the pleasure of consenting to negotiations sometime before then what we must plan to offer as a defense of Administration policy is not victory over Hanoi, but growing success -- and self-reliance -- in the South. This we can do, with luck, and on this side of the parallel the Vietnamese authorities should be prepared to help us out (though of course the VC will do their damndest against us.) Large parts of Westy's speech (if not quite all of it) were wholly consistent with this line of argument. 77

His summation must have been even more gratifying for the beleaguered President. It was both a paean to the President's achievements in Vietnam and an appeal to the prejudices that had sustained his policy from the beginning:

...if we can avoid escalation-that-does-not-seem-to-work, we can focus attention on the great and central achievement of these last two years: on the defeat we have prevented. The fact that South Vietnam has not been lost and is not going to be lost is a fact of truly massive importance in the history of Asia, the Pacific, and the U.S. An articulate minority of "Eastern intellectuals" (like Bill Fulbright) may not believe in what they call the domino theory, but most Americans (along with nearly all Asians) know better. Under this Administration the United States has already saved the hope of freedom for hundreds of millions -- in this sense, the largest part of the job is done. This critically important achievement is obscured by seeming to act as if we have to do much more lest we fail. 78/

Whatever his own reactions, the President was anxious to have the reactions of others to Bundy's reasoning. He asked McNamara to pass the main portion of the memo to the Chiefs for their comment without identifying its author. Chairman Wheeler promptly replied. His memo to the President on May 5 rejected the Bundy analysis in a detailed listing of the military benefits of attacking the DRV power grid and in a criticism of Bundy's list of bombing objectives for failing to include punitive pressure as a prime motive. With respect to Bundy's recommendation against interdicting Haiphong Harbor, the General was terse and pointed:

As a matter of cold fact, the Haiphong port is the single most vulnerable and important point in the lines of communications system of North Vietnam. During the first quarter of 1967 general cargo deliveries through Haiphong have set new records. In March 142,700 metric tons of cargo passed through the port; during the month of April there was a slight decline to 132,000 metric tons. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that in April 31,900 metric tons of bulk foodstuffs passed through the port bringing the total of foodstuffs delivered in the first four months of 1967 to 100,680 metric tons as compared to 77,100 metric tons of food received during all of calendar 1966. These tonnages underscore the importance of the port of Haiphong to the war effort of North Vietnam and support my statement that Haiphong is the most important point in the entire North Vietnamese lines of communications system. Unless and until we find some means of obstructing and reducing the flow of war supporting material through Haiphong, the North

Vietnamese will continue to be able to support their war effort both in North Vietnam and in South Vietnam. 79/

But the lines were already clearly being drawn in this internal struggle over escalation and for the first time all the civilians (both insiders and significant outsiders) were opposed to the military proposals in whole or part. At this early stage, however, the outcome was far from clear. On the same day the Chairman criticized the Bundy paper, Roger Fisher, McNaughton's longtime advisor from Harvard, at the suggestion of Walt Rostow and Doug Cater, sent the President a proposal re-orienting the U.S. effort both militarily and diplomatically. The flavor of his ideas, all of which had already appeared in notes to McNaughton, can be derived from a listing of the headings under which they were argued without going into his detailed arguments. His analysis fell under the following six general rubrics:

1. Pursue an on-the-ground interdiction strategy (barrier);
2. Concentrate air attacks in the southern portion of North Vietnam;
3. Offer Hanoi some realistic "yes-able" propositions;
4. Make the carrot more believable;
5. Give the NLF a decidable question;
6. Give local Viet Cong leaders a chance to opt out of the war. 80/

The arguments to the President for applying the brakes to our involvement in this seemingly endless, winless struggle were, thus, being made from all sides, except the military who remained adamant for escalation.

2. The May DPM Exercise

The available documents do not reveal what happened to the option exercise that Katzenbach had launched on April 24. But at this point in the debate over future direction for U.S. policy in South-east Asia, attention shifted to a draft memorandum for the President written by John McNaughton for McNamara's eventual signature. (A W. Bundy memo on May 30 suggests the Katzenbach exercise was overtaken by Defense's DPM effort.) The DPM at the Pentagon is more than a statement of the Secretary's views, however, it is an important bureaucratic device for achieving consensus (or at least for getting people's opinions recorded on paper). McNaughton began his DPM by stating that the question before the house was:

whether to continue the program of air attacks in the Hanoi-Haiphong area or for an indefinite period to concentrate all attacks on the lines of communication in the lower half of North Vietnam (south of 20°). 81/

Short of attacking the ports, which was rejected as risking confrontation with the USSR, the Memorandum said, there were few important targets left. The alternative of striking minor fixed targets and continuing armed reconnaissance against the transportation system north of 20° was relatively costly, risky, and unprofitable:

We have the alternative open to us of continuing to conduct attacks between 20-23° -- that is, striking minor fixed targets (like battery, fertilizer, and rubber plants and barracks) while conducting armed reconnaissance against movement on roads, railroads and waterways. This course, however, is costly in American lives and involves serious dangers of escalation. The loss rate in Hanoi-Haiphong Route Package 6 [the northeast quadrant], for example, is more than six times the loss rate in the southernmost Route Packages 1 and 2; and actions in the Hanoi-Haiphong area involve serious risks of generating confrontations with the Soviet Union and China, both because they involve destruction of MIGs on the ground and encounters with the MIGs in the air and because they may be construed as a US intention to crush the Hanoi regime.

The military gain from destruction of additional military targets north of 20° will be slight. If we believed that air attacks in that area would change Hanoi's will, they might be worth the added loss of American life and the risks of expansion of the war. However, there is no evidence that this will be the case, while there is considerable evidence that such bombing will strengthen Hanoi's will. In this connection, Consul-General Rice [of Hong Kong]... said what we believe to be the case -- that we cannot by bombing reach the critical level of pain in North Vietnam and that, "below that level, pain only increases the will to fight." Sir Robert Thompson, who was a key officer in the British success in Malaya, said... that our bombing, particularly in the Red River basin, "is unifying North Vietnam." 82/

Nor, the Memorandum continued, was bombing in northernmost NVN essential for the morale of SVN and US troops. General Westmoreland fully supported strikes in the Hanoi/Haiphong area and had even said, as noted before, that he was "frankly dismayed at even the thought of stopping the bombing program," but his basic requirement was for continuation of bombing in the "extended battle zone" near the DMZ.

The Memorandum went on to recommend what Roger Fisher had been suggesting, namely concentrating strikes in the lower half of NVN, without, however, turning the upper half into a completely forbidden sanctuary:

We therefore recommend that all of the sorties allocated to the ROLLING THUNDER program be concentrated on the lines of communications -- the "funnel" through which men and supplies to the South must flow -- between 17-20° reserving the option and intention to strike (in the 20-30° area) as necessary to keep the enemy's investment in defense and in repair crews high throughout the country. 83/

The proposed change in policy was not aimed at getting NVN to change its behavior or to negotiate, and no favorable response from Hanoi should be expected:

But to optimize the chances of a favorable Hanoi reaction, the scenario should be (a) to inform the Soviets quietly (on May 15) that within a few (5) days the policy would be implemented, stating no time limits and making no promises not to return to the Red River basin to attack targets which later acquired military importance, and then (b) to make an unhuckstered shift as predicted on May 20. We would expect Moscow to pass the May 15 information on to Hanoi, perhaps (but probably not) urging Hanoi to seize the opportunity to de-escalate the war by talks or otherwise. Hanoi, not having been asked a question by us and having no ultimatum-like time limit, might be in a better posture to react favorably than has been the case in the past. 84/

The Memorandum recommended that the de-escalation be explained as improving the military effectiveness of the bombing, in accordance with the interdiction rationale:

Publicly, when the shift had become obvious (May 21 or 22), we should explain (a) that as we have always said, the war must be won in the South, (b) that we have never said bombing of the North would produce a settlement by breaking Hanoi's will or by shutting off the flow of supplies, (c) that the North must pay a price for its infiltration, (d) that the major northern military targets have been destroyed, and (e) that now we are concentrating on the narrow neck through which supplies must flow, believing that the concentrated effort there, as compared with a dispersed effort throughout North Vietnam, under present circumstances will increase the efficiency of our interdiction effort, and (f) that we may have to return to targets further north if military considerations require it. 85/

This McNaughton DPM on bombing was prepared as an adjunct to a larger DPM on the overall strategy of the war and new ground force deployments. Together they were the focus of a frantic weekend of work in anticipation of a White House meeting on Monday, May 8. That meeting would not, however, produce any positive decisions and the entire drafting exercise would continue until the following week when McNamara finally transmitted a draft memorandum to the President. Among those in the capital that weekend to advise the President was McGeorge Bundy with whom McNamara conferred on Sunday. 86/

Walt Rostow at the White House circulated a discussion paper on Saturday, May 6, entitled "U.S. Strategy in Viet Nam." Rostow's paper began by reviewing what the U.S. was attempting to do in the war: frustrate a communist takeover "by defeating their main force units; attacking the guerilla infrastructure; and building a South Vietnamese governmental and security structure...." 87/ The purpose of the air war in the North was defined as "To hasten the decision in Hanoi to abandon the aggression..." for which we specifically sought:

- (i) to limit and harass infiltration; and
- (ii) to impose on the North sufficient military and civil cost to make them decide to get out of the war earlier rather than later. 88/

Sensitive to the criticisms of the bombing, Rostow tried to dispose of certain of their arguments:

We have never held the view that bombing could stop infiltration. We have never held the view that bombing of the Hanoi-Haiphong area alone would lead them to abandon the effort in the South. We have never held the view that bombing Hanoi-Haiphong would directly cut back infiltration. We have held the view that the degree of military and civilian cost felt in the North and the diversion of resources to deal with our bombing could contribute marginally--and perhaps significantly--to the timing of a decision to end the war. But it was no substitute for making progress in the South. 89/

Rostow argued that while there were policy decisions to be made about the war in the South, particularly with respect to new force levels, there existed no real disagreement with the Administration as to our general strategy on the ground. Where contention did exist was in the matter of the air war. Here there were three broad strategies that could be pursued. Rostow offered a lengthy analysis of the three options which is included here in its entirety since to summarize it would sacrifice much of its pungency.

A. Closing the top of the funnel

Under this strategy we would mine the major harbors and, perhaps, bomb port facilities and even consider blockade. In addition, we would attack systematically the rail lines between Hanoi and mainland China. At the moment the total import capacity into North Viet Nam is about 17,200 tons per day. Even with expanded import requirement due to the food shortage, imports are, in fact, coming in at about 5700 tons per day. It is possible with a concerted and determined effort that we could cut back import capacity somewhat below the level of requirements; but this is not sure. On the other hand, it would require a difficult and sustained effort by North Viet Nam and its allies to prevent a reduction in total imports below requirements if we did all these things.

The costs would be these:

--The Soviet Union would have to permit a radical increase in Hanoi's dependence upon Communist China, or introduce minesweepers, etc., to keep its supplies coming into Hanoi by sea;

--The Chinese Communists would probably introduce many more engineering and anti-aircraft forces along the roads and rail lines between Hanoi and China in order to keep the supplies moving;

--To maintain its prestige, in case it could not or would not open up Hanoi-Haiphong in the face of mines, the Soviet Union might contemplate creating a Berlin crisis. With respect to a Berlin crisis, they would have to weigh the possible split between the U.S. and its Western European allies under this pressure against damage to the atmosphere of detente in Europe which is working in favor of the French Communist Party and providing the Soviet Union with generally enlarged influence in Western Europe.

I myself do not believe that the Soviet Union would go to war with us over Viet Nam unless we sought to occupy North Viet Nam; and, even then, a military response from Moscow would not be certain.

With respect to Communist China, it always has the option of invading Laos and Thailand; but this would not be a rational response to naval and air operations designed to strangle Hanoi. A war throughout Southeast Asia would not help Hanoi; although I do believe Communist China would

fight us if we invaded the northern part of North Viet Nam.

One can always take the view that, given the turmoil inside Communist China, an irrational act by Peiping is possible. And such irrationality cannot be ruled out.

I conclude that if we try to close the top of the funnel, tension between ourselves and the Soviet Union and Communist China would increase; if we were very determined, we could impose additional burdens on Hanoi and its allies; we might cut capacity below requirements; and the outcome is less likely to be a general war than more likely.

B. Attacking what is inside the funnel

This is what we have been doing in the Hanoi-Haiphong area for some weeks. I do not agree with the view that the attacks on Hanoi-Haiphong have no bearing on the war in the South. They divert massive amounts of resources, energies, and attention to keeping the civil and military establishment going. They impose general economic, political, and psychological difficulties on the North which have been complicated this year by a bad harvest and food shortages. I do not believe that they "harden the will of the North." In my judgment, up to this point, our bombing of the North has been a painful additional cost they have thus far been willing to bear to pursue their efforts in the South.

On the other hand:

--There is no direct, immediate connection between bombing the Hanoi-Haiphong area and the battle in the South;

--If we complete the attack on electric power by taking out the Hanoi station -- which constitutes about 80% of the electric power supply of the country now operating -- we will have hit most of the targets whose destruction imposes serious military-civil costs on the North.

-- With respect to risk, it is unclear whether Soviet warnings about our bombing Hanoi-Haiphong represent decisions already taken or decisions which might be taken if we persist in banging away in that area.

It is my judgment that the Soviet reaction will continue to be addressed to the problem imposed on Hanoi by us; that is, they might introduce Soviet pilots as they did in the Korean War; they might bring ground-to-ground missiles into North Viet Nam with the object of attacking our vessels at sea and

our airfields in the Danang area.

I do not believe that the continuation of attacks at about the level we have been conducting them in the Hanoi-Haiphong area will lead to pressure on Berlin or a general war with the Soviet Union. In fact, carefully read, what the Soviets have been trying to signal is: Keep away from our ships; we may counter-escalate to some degree; but we do not want a nuclear confrontation over Viet Nam.

C. Concentration in Route Packages 1 and 2

The advantages of concentrating virtually all our attacks in this area are three:

--We would cut our loss rate in pilots and planes;

--We would somewhat improve our harassment of infiltration of South Viet Nam;

--We would diminish the risks of counter-escalatory action by the Soviet Union and Communist China, as compared with courses A and B.

With this analysis of the pros and cons of the various options, Rostow turned to recommendations. He rejected course A as incurring too many risks with too little return. Picking up McNaughton's recommendation for concentrating the air war in the North Vietnamese panhandle, Rostow urged that it be supplemented with an open option to return to the northern "funnel" if developments warranted it. Here is how he formulated his conclusions:

With respect to Course B I believe we have achieved greater results in increasing the pressure on Hanoi and raising the cost of their continuing to conduct the aggression in the South than some of my most respected colleagues would agree. I do not believe we should lightly abandon what we have accomplished; and specifically, I believe we should mount the most economical and careful attack on the Hanoi power station our air tacticians can devise. Moreover, I believe we should keep open the option of coming back to the Hanoi-Haiphong area, depending upon what we learn of their repair operations; and what Moscow's and Peiping's reactions are; especially when we understand better what effects we have and have not achieved thus far.

I believe the Soviet Union may well have taken certain counter-steps addressed to the more effective protection of

the Hanoi-Haiphong area and may have decided -- or could shortly decide -- to introduce into North Viet Nam some surface-to-surface missiles.

With respect to option C, I believe we should, while keeping open the B option, concentrate our attacks to the maximum in Route Packages 1 and 2; and, in conducting Hanoi-Haiphong attacks, we should do so only when the targets make sense. I do not expect dramatic results from increasing the weight of attack in Route Packages 1 and 2; but I believe we are wasting a good many pilots in the Hanoi-Haiphong area without commensurate results. The major objectives of maintaining the B option can be achieved at lower cost. 90/

Although he had endorsed a strike on the Hanoi power plant, he rejected any attack on the air fields in a terse, one sentence final paragraph, "Air field attacks are only appropriate to the kind of sustained operations in the Hanoi-Haiphong area associated with option A."

Two important members of the Administration, McNaughton and Rostow, had thus weighed in for confining the bombing to the panhandle under some formula or other. On Monday, May 8, presumably before the policy meeting, William Bundy circulated a draft memo of his own which pulled the problem apart and assembled the pieces in a very different way. Like the others, Bundy's draft started from the assumption that bombing decisions would be related to other decisions on the war for which a consensus appeared to exist: pressing ahead with pacification; continued political progress in the South; and continued pressure on the North. To Bundy's way of thinking there were four broad target categories that could be combined into various bombing options:

1. "Concentration on supply routes." This would comprise attacks on supply routes in the southern "bottleneck" areas of North Vietnam, from the 20th parallel south.

2. "Re-strikes." This would comprise attacks on targets already hit, including unless otherwise stated sensitive targets north of the 20th parallel and in and around Hanoi/Haiphong, which were hit in the last three weeks.

3. "Additional sensitive targets." North of the 20th parallel, there are additional sensitive targets that have been on our recent lists, including Rolling Thunder 56. Some are of lesser importance, some are clearly "extremely sensitive" (category 4 below), but at least three -- the Hanoi power station, the Red River bridge, and the Phuc Yen airfield -- could be said to round out the April program. These three are the essential targets included in this category 3.

4. "Extremely sensitive targets." This would comprise targets that are exceptionally sensitive, in terms of Chinese and/or Soviet reaction, as well as domestic and international factors. For example, this list would include mining of Haiphong, /bombing of critical port facilities in Haiphong, - pencilled in/ and bombing of dikes and dams not directly related to supply route waterways and/or involving heavy flooding to crops. 92/

Bundy suggested that by looking at the targetting problem in this way a series of options could be generated that were more sensitive to considerations of time-phasing. He offered five such options:

Option A would be to move up steadily to hit all the target categories, including the extremely sensitive targets.

Option B would be to step up the level a little further and stay at that higher level through consistent and fairly frequent re-strikes. Specifically, this would involve hitting the additional sensitive targets and then keeping all sensitive targets open to re-strike, although with individual authorization.

Option C would be to raise the level slightly in the near future by hitting the additional sensitive targets, but then to cut back essentially to concentration on supply routes. Re-strikes north of the 20th parallel would be very limited under this option once the additional sensitive targets had been hit, and would be limited to re-strikes necessary to eliminate targets directly important to infiltration and, as necessary, to keep Hanoi's air defense system in place.

Option D would be not to hit the additional sensitive targets, and to define a fairly level program that would concentrate heavily on the supply routes but would include a significant number of re-strikes north of the 20th parallel. Since these re-strikes would still be substantially less bunched than in April, the net effect would be to scale down the bombing slightly from present levels, and to hold it there.

Option E would be to cut back at once to concentration on supply routes. Re-strikes north of the 20th parallel would be limited to those defined under Option C. 93/

To crystallize more clearly in his readers' minds what the options implied in intensity compared with the current effort he employed a numerical analogy:

To put a rough numerical index on these options, one might start by saying that our general level in the past year has been Force 4, with occasional temporary increases to Force 5 (POL and the December Hanoi strikes). On such a rough numerical scale, our April program has put us at Force 6 at present. Option A would raise this to 8 or 9 and keep it there, Option F would raise it to 7 and keep it there, Option C would raise it to 7 and then drop it to 3, Option D would lower it to 5 and keep it there, and Option E would lower it to 3 and keep it there. 94/

Bundy's analysis of the merits of the five options began with the estimate that the likelihood of Chinese intervention in the war was slight except in the case of option A, a probability he considered a major argument against it. He did not expect any of the courses of produce a direct Soviet intervention, but warned against the possibility of Soviet pressures elsewhere if option A were selected. He underscored a report from Ambassador Thompson that the Soviets had been greatly concerned by the April bombing program and were currently closeted in deliberations on general policy direction. Bombing of any major new targets in the immediate future would have an adverse effect on the Soviet leadership and was discouraged by Bundy. Option A was singled out for further condemnation based on the views of some China experts who argued that an intensive bombing program might be just what Mao needed to restore internal order in China and resolidify his control.

With respect to the effect of the bombing on North Vietnam, Bundy cited the evidence that strikes against the sensitive military targets were having only temporary and marginal positive benefits, and they were extremely costly in planes and pilots lost. By restricting the bombing to South of the 20th parallel as McNaughton had suggested, the military payoff might just be greater and the psychological strengthening of North Vietnamese will and morale less. The main factor in Hanoi attitudes, however, was the war in the South and neither a bombing halt nor an intensive escalation would have a decisive impact on it one way or the other. In Bundy's estimation Hanoi had dug in for at least another six months, and possibly until after the US elections in 1968. In the face of this the U.S. should try to project an image of steady, even commitment without radical shifts. This approach seemed to Bundy best suited to maximizing U.S. public support as well, since none of the courses would really satisfy either the convinced "doves" or the unflinching "hawks." The bombing had long since ceased to have much effect on South

Vietnamese morale, and international opinion would react strongly to any serious escalation. Closing out his analysis, Bundy argued for a decision soon, possibly before the upcoming one-day truce on Buddha's birthday, May 23, when the new program might be presented.

On the basis of this analysis of the pros and cons, Bundy concluded that options A and B had been clearly eliminated. Of the three remaining courses he urged the adoption of D, thus aligning himself generally with McNaughton and Rostow. The specific reasons he adduced for his recommendation were the following:

Option D Elaborated and Argued

The first element in Option D is that it would not carry the April program to its logical conclusion by hitting the Hanoi power station, the Red River bridge, and the Phuc Yen airfield, even once.

The argument against these targets is in part based on reactions already discussed. Although we do not believe that they would have any significant chance of bringing the Chinese into the war, they might have a hardening effect on immediate Soviet decisions, and could significantly aggravate criticism in the UK and elsewhere.

The argument relates above all to the precise nature and location of these targets. The Hanoi power station is only a half mile from the Russian and Chinese Embassies, and still closer to major residential areas. The Red River bridge is the very area of Hanoi that got us into the greatest outcry in December. In both cases, the slightest mistake could produce really major and evident civilian casualties and tremendously aggravate the general reactions we have already assessed.

As to the Phuc Yen airfield, we believe there is a significant chance that this attack would cause Hanoi to assume we were going to make their jet operational airfields progressively untenable. This could significantly and in itself increase the chances of their moving planes to China and all the interacting possibilities that then arise. We believe we have gone far enough to hurt them and worry them. Is it wise to go this further step?

The second element in this strategy is that it would level off where we are, but with specific provision for periodic re-strikes against the targets we have already hit. This has clear pros and cons.

Pros. Continued re-strikes would maintain the concrete results already attained--the lights would stay out in Haiphong for the most part.

Continued re-strikes would tend to keep the "hawks" under control. Indeed, without them, it would almost certainly be asked why we had ever hit the targets in the first place. This might conceivably happen without re-strikes, but would be at least doubtful.

Most basically, Hanoi and Moscow would be kept at least a little on edge. As we have noted earlier, fear of ultimate expansion of the war is an element that tends to impel the Soviets to maximize and use their leverage on Hanoi toward a peaceful settlement. 95/

This significant convergence of opinion on bombing strategy in the next phase among key Presidential advisers could not have gone unnoticed in the May 8 meeting, but there being no record of what transpired, the consensus can only be inferred from the fact that the 19 May DPM did incorporate a bombing recommendation along these lines. Intervening before then to reinforce the views of the civilian Principals were several CIA intelligence memos. Together they constituted another repudiation of the utility of the bombing. The summary CIA view of the effect of the bombing on North Vietnamese thinking was that:

Twenty-seven months of US bombing of North Vietnam have had remarkably little effect on Hanoi's over-all strategy in prosecuting the war, on its confident view of long-term Communist prospects, and on its political tactics regarding negotiations. The growing pressure of US air operations has not shaken the North Vietnamese leaders' conviction that they can withstand the bombing and outlast the US and South Vietnam in a protracted war of attrition. Nor has it caused them to waver in their belief that the outcome of this test of will and endurance will be determined primarily by the course of the conflict on the ground in the South, not by the air war in the North. 96/

As to the state of popular morale after two years of U.S. bombing, the CIA concluded that:

Morale in the DRV among the rank and file populace, defined in terms of discipline, confidence, and willingness to endure hardship, appears to have undergone only a small decline since the bombing of North Vietnam began.

* * * * *

With only a few exceptions, recent reports suggest a continued willingness on the part of the populace to abide by Hanoi's policy on the war. Evidence of determination to persist in support of the war effort continues to be as plentiful in these reports as in the past. The current popular mood might best be characterized, in fact, as one of resolute stoicism with a considerable reservoir of endurance still untapped. 97/

Even the extensive physical damage the bombing had done to North Vietnam could not be regarded as meaningfully reducing Hanoi's capacity to sustain the war:

Through the end of April 1967 the US air campaign against North Vietnam--Rolling Thunder--had significantly eroded the capacities of North Vietnam's limited industrial and military base. These losses, however, have not meaningfully degraded North Vietnam's material ability to continue the war in South Vietnam. 98/

Certain target systems had suffered more than others, particularly transportation and electric power, but throughput capacity for materiel had not been significantly decreased. One of the fundamental reasons was the remarkable ability the North Vietnamese had demonstrated to recuperate quickly from the strikes:

North Vietnam's ability to recuperate from the air attacks has been of a high order. The major exception has been the electric power industry.

* * * * *

The recuperability problem is not significant for the other target systems. The destroyed petroleum storage system has been replaced by an effective system of dispersed storage and distribution. The damaged military targets systems--particularly barracks and storage depots--have simply been abandoned, and supplies and troops dispersed throughout the country. The inventories of transport and military equipment have been replaced by large infusions of military and economic aid from the USSR and Communist China. Damage to bridges and lines of communications is frequently repaired within a matter of days, if not hours, or the effects are countered by an elaborate system of multiple bypasses or pre-positioned spans. 99/

3. The May 19 DPM

By the 19th of May the opinions of McNamara and his key aides with respect to the bombing and Westy's troop requests had crystalized sufficiently that another Draft Presidential Memorandum was written. It was entitled, "Future Actions in Vietnam," and was a comprehensive treatment of all aspects of the war -- military, political, and diplomatic. It opened with an appraisal of the situation covering both North and South Vietnam, the U.S. domestic scene and international opinion. The estimate of the situation in North Vietnam hewed very close to the opinions of the intelligence community already referred to. Here is how the analysis proceeded:

C. North Vietnam

Hanoi's attitude towards negotiations has never been soft nor open-minded. Any concession on their part would involve an enormous loss of face. Whether or not the Polish and Burchett-Kosygin initiatives had much substance to them, it is clear that Hanoi's attitude currently is hard and rigid. They seem uninterested in a political settlement and determined to match US military expansion of the conflict. This change probably reflects these factors: (1) increased assurances of help from the Soviets received during Pham Van Dong's April trip to Moscow; (2) arrangements providing for the unhindered passage of materiel from the Soviet Union through China; and (3) a decision to wait for the results of the US elections in 1968. Hanoi appears to have concluded that she cannot secure her objectives at the conference table and has reaffirmed her strategy of seeking to erode our ability to remain in the South. The Hanoi leadership has apparently decided that it has no choice but to submit to the increased bombing. There continues to be no sign that the bombing has reduced Hanoi's will to resist or her ability to ship the necessary supplies south. Hanoi shows no signs of ending the large war and advising the VC to melt into the jungles. The North Vietnamese believe they are right; they consider the Ky regime to be puppets; they believe the world is with them and that the American public will not have staying power against them. Thus, although they may have factions in the regime favoring different approaches, they believe that, in the long run, they are stronger than we are for the purpose. They probably do not want to make significant concessions, and could not do so without serious loss of face. 100/

When added to the continuing difficulties in bringing the war in the South under control, the unchecked erosion of U.S. public support for the war, and the smoldering international disquiet about the need

and purpose of such U.S. intervention, it is not hard to understand the DPM's statement that, "This memorandum is written at a time when there appears to be no attractive course of action." 101/ Nevertheless, 'alternatives' was precisely what the DPM had been written to suggest. These were introduced with a recapitulation of where we stood militarily and what the Chiefs were recommending. With respect to the war in the North, the DPM stated:

Against North Vietnam, an expansion of the bombing program (ROLLING THUNDER 56) was approved mid-April. Before it was approved, General Wheeler said, "The bombing campaign is reaching the point where we will have struck all worthwhile fixed targets except the ports. At this time we will have to address the requirement to deny the DRV the use of the ports." With its approval, excluding the port areas, no major military targets remain to be struck in the North. All that remains are minor targets, restrikes of certain major targets, and armed reconnaissance of the lines of communication (LOCs) -- and, under new principles, mining the harbors, bombing dikes and locks, and invading North Vietnam with land armies. These new military moves against North Vietnam, together with land movements into Laos and Cambodia, are now under consideration by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. 102/

two: The broad alternative courses of action it considered were

COURSE A. Grant the request and intensify military actions outside the South -- especially against the North.
Add a minimum of 200,000 men -- 100,000 (2-1/3 division plus 5 tactical air squadrons) would be deployed in FY 1968, another 100,000 (2-1/3 divisions and 8 tactical air squadrons) in FY 1969, and possibly more later to fulfill the JCS ultimate requirement for Vietnam and associated world-wide contingencies. Accompanying these force increases (as spelled out below) would be greatly intensified military actions outside South Vietnam -- including in Laos and Cambodia but especially against the North.

COURSE B. Limit force increases to no more than 30,000;
avoid extending the ground conflict beyond the borders of South Vietnam; and concentrate the bombing on the infiltration routes south of 20°. Unless the military situation worsens dramatically, add no more than 9 battalions of the approved program of 87 battalions. This course would result in a level of no more than 500,000 men (instead of the currently planned 470,000) on December 31, 1968. (See Attachment IV for details.) A part of this course would be a termination of bombing in the Red River basin unless military necessity required it, and a concentration of all sorties in North Vietnam on the

infiltration routes in the neck of North Vietnam, between 17° and 20°. 103/

For the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to develop the entire DPM argumentation of the pros and cons of the respective courses of action. It will suffice to include the sections dealing with the air war elements of the two options. (It should be noted, however, that the air and ground programs were treated as an integrated package in each option.) This then was the way the DPM developed the analysis of the war segment of course of action A:

Bombing Purposes and Payoffs

Our bombing of North Vietnam was designed to serve three purposes:

--(1) To retaliate and to lift the morale of the people in the South who were being attacked by agents of the North.

--(2) To add to the pressure on Hanoi to end the war.

--(3) To reduce the flow and/or to increase the cost of infiltrating men and material from North to South.

We cannot ignore that a limitation on bombing will cause serious psychological problems among the men, officers and commanders, who will not be able to understand why we should withhold punishment from the enemy. General Westmoreland said that he is "frankly dismayed at even the thought of stopping the bombing program." But this reason for attacking North Vietnam must be scrutinized carefully. We should not bomb for punitive reasons if it serves no other purpose -- especially if analysis shows that the actions may be counterproductive. It costs American lives; it creates a backfire of revulsion and opposition by killing civilians; it creates serious risks; it may harden the enemy.

With respect to added pressure on the North, it is becoming apparent that Hanoi may already have "written off" all assets and lives that might be destroyed by US military actions short of occupation or annihilation. They can and will hold out at least so long as a prospect of winning the "war of attrition" in the South exists. And our best judgment is that a Hanoi prerequisite to negotiations is significant retrenchment (if not complete

stoppage of US military actions against them -- at the least, a cessation of bombing. In this connection, Consul-General Rice (Hong Kong 7581, 5/1/67) said that, in his opinion, we cannot by bombing reach the critical level of pain in North Vietnam and that, "below that level, pain only increases the will to fight." Sir Robert Thompson said to Mr. Vance on April 28 that our bombing, particularly in the Red River Delta, "is unifying North Vietnam."

With respect to interdiction of men and materiel, it now appears that no combination of actions against the North short of destruction of the regime or occupation of North Vietnamese territory will physically reduce the flow of men and materiel below the relatively small amount needed by enemy forces to continue the war in the South. Our effort can and does have severe disruptive effects, which Hanoi can and does plan on and pre-stock against. Our efforts physically to cut the flow meaningfully by actions in North Vietnam therefore largely fail and, in failing, transmute attempted interdiction into pain, or pressure on the North (the factor discussed in the paragraph next above). The lowest "ceiling" on infiltration can probably be achieved by concentration on the North Vietnamese "funnel" south of 20° and on the Trail in Laos.

But what if the above analyses are wrong? Why not escalate the bombing and mine the harbors (and perhaps occupy southern North Vietnam) -- on the gamble that it would constrict the flow, meaningfully limiting enemy action in the South, and that it would bend Hanoi? The answer is that the costs and risks of the actions must be considered.

The primary costs of course are US lives: The air campaign against heavily defended areas costs us one pilot in every 40 sorties. In addition, an important but hard-to-measure cost is domestic and world opinion: There may be a limit beyond which many Americans and much of the world will not permit the United States to go. The picture of the world's greatest superpower killing or seriously injuring 1000 non-combatants a week, while trying to pound a tiny backward nation into submission on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed, is not a pretty one. It could conceivably produce a costly distortion in the American national consciousness and in the world image of the United States -- especially if the damage to North Vietnam is complete enough to be "successful."

The most important risk, however, is the likely Soviet, Chinese and North Vietnamese reaction to intensified US air attacks, harbor-mining, and ground actions against North Vietnam.

Likely Communist Reactions

At the present time, no actions -- except air strikes and artillery fire necessary to quiet hostile batteries across the border -- are allowed against Cambodian territory. In Laos, we average 5000 attack sorties a month against the infiltration routes and base areas, we fire artillery from South Vietnam against targets in Laos, and we will be providing 3-man leadership for each of 20 12-man US-Vietnamese Special Forces teams that operate to a depth of 20 kilometers into Laos. Against North Vietnam, we average 8,000 or more attack sorties a month against all worthwhile fixed and LOC targets; we use artillery against ground targets across the DMZ; we fire from naval vessels at targets ashore and afloat up to 19°; and we mine their inland waterways, estuaries...up to 20°.

Intensified air attacks against the same types of targets, we would anticipate, would lead to no great change in the policies and reactions of the Communist powers beyond the furnishing of some new equipment and manpower.* China, for example, has not reacted to our striking MIG fields in North Vietnam, and we do not expect them to, although there are some signs of greater Chinese participation in North Vietnamese air defense.

Mining the harbors would be much more serious. It would place Moscow in a particularly galling dilemma as to how to preserve the Soviet position and prestige in such a disadvantageous place. The Soviets might, but probably would not, force a confrontation in Southeast Asia -- where even with minesweepers they would be at as great a military disadvantage as we were when they blocked the corridor to Berlin in 1961, but where their vital interest, unlike ours in Berlin (and in Cuba), is not so clearly at stake. Moscow in this case should be expected to send volunteers, including pilots, to North Vietnam; to provide some new and better weapons and equipment;

* The U.S. Intelligence Board on May 5 said that Hanoi may press Moscow for additional equipment and that there is a "good chance that under pressure the Soviets would provide such weapons as cruise missiles and tactical rockets" in addition to a limited number of volunteers or crews for aircraft or sophisticated equipment. Moscow, with respect to equipment, might provide better surface-to-air missiles, better anti-aircraft guns, the YAK-28 aircraft, anti-tank missiles and artillery, heavier artillery and mortars, coastal defense missiles with 25-50 mile ranges and 2200-pound warheads, KOMAR guided-missile coastal patrol boats with 20-mile surface-to-surface missiles, and some chemical munitions. She might consider sending medium jet bombers and fighter bombers to pose a threat to all of South Vietnam.

to consider some action in Korea, Turkey, Iran, the Middle East or, most likely, Berlin, where the Soviets can control the degree of crisis better; and to show across-the-board hostility toward the US (interrupting any on-going conversations on ABMs, non-proliferation, etc.). China could be expected to seize upon the harbor-mining as the opportunity to reduce Soviet political influence in Hanoi and to discredit the USSR if the Soviets took no military action to open the ports. Peking might read the harbor-mining as indicating that the US was going to apply military pressure until North Vietnam capitulated, and that this meant an eventual invasion. If so, China might decide to intervene in the war with combat troops and air power, to which we would eventually have to respond by bombing Chinese airfields and perhaps other targets as well. Hanoi would tighten belts, refuse to talk, and persevere -- as it could without too much difficulty. North Vietnam would of course be fully dependent for supplies on China's will, and Soviet influence in Hanoi would therefore be reduced. (Ambassador Sullivan feels very strongly that it would be a serious mistake, by our actions against the port, to tip Hanoi away from Moscow and toward Peking.)

To US ground actions in North Vietnam, we would expect China to respond by entering the war with both ground and air forces. The Soviet Union could be expected in these circumstances to take all actions listed above under the lesser provocations and to generate a serious confrontation with the United States at one or more places of her own choosing. 104/

The arguments against Course A were summed up in a final paragraph:

Those are the likely costs and risks of COURSE A. They are, we believe, both unacceptable and unnecessary. Ground action in North Vietnam, because of its escalatory potential, is clearly unwise despite the open invitation and temptation posed by enemy troops operating freely back and forth across the DMZ. Yet we believe that, short of threatening and perhaps toppling the Hanoi regime itself, pressure against the North will, if anything, harden Hanoi's unwillingness to talk and her settlement terms if she does. China, we believe, will oppose settlement throughout. We believe that there is a chance that the Soviets, at the brink, will exert efforts to bring about peace; but we believe also that intensified bombing and harbor-mining, even if coupled with political pressure from Moscow, will neither bring Hanoi to negotiate nor affect North Vietnam's terms. 105/

With Course A rejected, the DPM turned to consideration of the levelling-off proposals of Course B. The analysis of the de-escalated bombing program of this option proceeded in this manner:

The bombing program that would be a part of this strategy is, basically, a program of concentration of effort on the infiltration routes near the south of North Vietnam. The major infiltration-related targets in the Red River basin having been destroyed, such interdiction is now best served by concentration of all effort in the southern neck of North Vietnam. All of the sorties would be flown in the area between 17° and 20°. This shift, despite possible increases in anti-aircraft capability in the area, should reduce the pilot and aircraft loss rates by more than 50 per cent. The shift will, if anything, be of positive military value to General Westmoreland while taking some steam out of the popular effort in the North.

The above shift of bombing strategy, now that almost all major targets have been struck in the Red River basin, can to military advantage be made at any time. It should not be done for the sole purpose of getting Hanoi to negotiate, although that might be a bonus effect. To maximize the chances of getting that bonus effect, the optimum scenario would probably be (1) to inform the Soviets quietly that within a few days the shift would take place, stating no time limits but making no promises not to return to the Red River basin to attack targets which later acquire military importance (any deal with Hanoi is likely to be mid-wifed by Moscow); (2) to make the shift as predicted, without fanfare; and (3) to explain publicly, when the shift had become obvious, that the northern targets had been destroyed, that that had been militarily important, and that there would be no need to return to the northern areas unless military necessity dictated it. The shift should not be huckstered. Moscow would almost certainly pass its information on to Hanoi, and might urge Hanoi to seize the opportunity to de-escalate the war by talks or otherwise. Hanoi, not having been asked a question by us and having no ultimatum-like time limit, would be in a better posture to answer favorably than has been the case in the past. The military side of the shift is sound, however, whether or not the diplomatic spill-over is successful. 106/

In a section dealing with diplomatic and political considerations, the DPM outlined the political view of the significance of the struggle as seen by the US and by Hanoi. It then developed a conception of larger US interests in Asia around the necessity of containing China. This larger interest required settling the Vietnam

war into perspective as only one of three fronts that required U.S. attention (the other two being Japan-Korea and India-Pakistan). In the overall view, the DFM argued, long-run trends in Asia appeared favorable to our interests:

The fact is that the trends in Asia today are running mostly for, not against, our interests (witness Indonesia and the Chinese confusion); there is no reason to be pessimistic about our ability over the next decade or two to fashion alliances and combinations (involving especially Japan and India) sufficient to keep China from encroaching too far. To the extent that our original intervention and our existing actions in Vietnam were motivated by the perceived need to draw the line against Chinese expansionism in Asia, our objective has already been attained, and COURSE B will suffice to consolidate it! 107/

With this perspective in mind the DFM went on to reconsider and restate U.S. objectives in the Vietnam contest under the heading "Commitment and Hopes Distinguished":

The time has come for us to eliminate the ambiguities from our minimum objectives -- our commitments -- in Vietnam. Specifically, two principles must be articulated, and policies and actions brought in line with them: (1) Our commitment is only to see that the people of South Vietnam are permitted to determine their own future. (2) This commitment ceases if the country ceases to help itself.

It follows that no matter how much we might hope for some things, our commitment is not:

- to expel from South Vietnam regroupes, who are South Vietnamese (though we do not like them),
- to ensure that a particular person or group remains in power, nor that the power runs to every corner of the land (though we prefer certain types and we hope their writ will run throughout South Vietnam),
- to guarantee that the self-chosen government is non-Communist (though we believe and strongly hope it will be), and
- to insist that the independent South Vietnam remain separate from North Vietnam (though in the short-run, we would prefer it that way).

(Nor do we have an obligation to pour in effort out of proportion to the effort contributed by the people of South Vietnam or in the face of coups, corruption, apathy or other indications of Saigon failure to cooperate effectively with us.)

We are committed to stopping or off setting the effect of North Vietnam's application of force in the South, which denies the people of the South the ability to determine their own future. Even here, however, the line is hard to draw. Propaganda and political advice by Hanoi (or by Washington) is presumably not barred; nor is economic aid or economic advisors. Less clear is the rule to apply to military advisors and war materiel supplied to the contesting factions.

The importance of nailing down and understanding the implications of our limited objectives cannot be over-emphasized. It relates intimately to strategy against the North, to troop requirements and missions in the South, to handling of the Saigon government, to settlement terms, and to US domestic and international opinion as to the justification and the success of our efforts on behalf of Vietnam. 108/

This articulation of American purposes and commitments in Vietnam pointedly rejected the high blown formulations of U.S. objectives in NSAM 288 ("an independent non-communist South Vietnam," "defeat the Viet Cong," etc.), and came forcefully to grips with the old dilemma of the U.S. involvement dating from the Kennedy era: only limited means to achieve excessive ends. Indeed, in the following section of specific recommendations, the DPM urged the President to, "Issue a NSAM nailing down US policy as described herein." 109/ The emphasis in this scaled-down set of goals, clearly reflecting the frustrations of failure, was South Vietnamese self-determination. The DPM even went so far as to suggest that, "the South will be in position /sic/, albeit imperfect, to start the business of producing a full-spectrum government in South Vietnam." 110/ What this amounted to was a recommendation that we accept a compromise outcome. Let there be no mistake these were radical positions for a senior U.S. policy official within the Johnson Administration to take. They would bring the bitter condemnation of the Chiefs and were scarcely designed to flatter the President on the success of his efforts to date. That they represented a more realistic mating of U.S. strategic objectives and capabilities is another matter.

The scenario for the unfolding of the recommendations in the DPM went like this:

(4) June: Concentrate the bombing of North Vietnam on physical interdiction of men and materiel. This would mean terminating, except where the interdiction objective clearly dictates otherwise, all bombing north of 20° and improving interdiction as much as possible in the infiltration "funnel" south of 20° by concentration of sorties and by an all-out effort to improve detection devices, denial weapons, and interdiction tactics.

(5) July: Avoid the explosive Congressional debate and US Reserve call-up implicit in the Westmoreland troop request. Decide that, unless the military situation worsens dramatically, US deployments will be limited to Program 4-plus (which, according to General Westmoreland, will not put us in danger of being defeated, but will mean slow progress in the South). Associated with this decision are decisions not to use large numbers of US troops in the Delta and not to use large numbers of them in grass-roots pacification work.

(6) September: Move the newly elected Saigon government well beyond its National Reconciliation program to seek a political settlement with the non-Communist members of the NLF--- to explore a ceasefire and to reach an accommodation with the non-Communist South Vietnamese who are under the VC banner; to accept them as members of an opposition political party, and, if necessary, to accept their individual participation in the national government -- in sum, a settlement to transform the members of the VC from military opponents to political opponents.

(7) October: Explain the situation to the Canadians, Indians, British, UN and others, as well as nations now contributing forces, requesting them to contribute border forces to help make the inside-South Vietnam accommodation possible, and -- consistent with our desire neither to occupy nor to have bases in Vietnam -- offering to remove later an equivalent number of U.S. forces. (This initiative is worth taking despite its slim chance of success.) 111/

Having made the case for de-escalation and compromise, the DPM ended on a note of candor with a clear statement of its disadvantages and problems:

The difficulties with this approach are neither few nor small: There will be those who disagree with the circumscription of the US commitment (indeed, at one time or another, one US voice or another has told the Vietnamese, third countries, the US Congress, and the public of "goals" or "objectives"

that go beyond the above bare-bones statement of our "commitment"); some will insist that pressure, enough pressure, on the North can pay off or that we will have yielded a blue chip without exacting a price in exchange for our concentrating on interdiction; many will argue that denial of the larger number of troops will prolong the war, risk losing it and increase the casualties of the Americans who are there; some will insist that this course reveals weakness to which Moscow will react with relief, contempt and reduced willingness to help, and to which Hanoi will react by increased demands and truculence; others will point to the difficulty of carrying the Koreans, Filipinos, Australians and New Zealanders with us; and there will be those who point out the possibility that the changed US tone may cause a "rush for the exists" in Thailand, in Laos and especially inside South Vietnam, perhaps threatening cohesion of the government, morale of the army, and loss of support among the people. Not least will be the alleged impact on the reputation of the United States and of its President. Nevertheless, the difficulties of this strategy are fewer and smaller than the difficulties of any other approach. 112/

McNamara showed the draft to the President the same day it was completed, but there is no record of his reaction. 113/ It is worth noting, however, that May 19 was the day that U.S. planes struck the Hanoi power plant just one-mile north of the center of Hanoi. That the President did not promptly endorse the McNamara recommendations as he had on occasions in the past is not surprising. This time he faced a situation where the Chiefs were in ardent opposition to anything other than a significant escalation of the war with a callup of reserves. This put them in direct opposition to McNamara and his aides and created a genuine policy dilemma for the President who had to consider the necessity of keeping the military "on-board" in any new direction for the U.S. effort in Southeast Asia.

4. JCS, CIA and State Reactions

In the two weeks after McNamara's DPM, the Washington paper-mill must have broken all previous production records. The JCS in particular literally bombarded the Secretary with memoranda, many of which had voluminous annexes. Their direct comments on the DPM did not come until ten days after it was transmitted to the President. Before then, however, aware of the McNamara proposals, they forwarded a number of studies each of which was the occasion to advance their own arguments for escalation.

On May 20, the Chiefs sent the Secretary two memos, one urging expansion of operations against North Vietnam (which they requested

he pass on to the President) and the other on worldwide force posture. 114/
In the former they argued that the objectives of causing NVN to pay an increasing price for support of the war in the South and interdicting such support had only been partially achieved, because the "incremental and restrained" application of air power had enabled NVN to "anticipate US actions and accomodate to the slow increase in pressure." They noted that NVN had greatly increased its imports in 1966 and that record tonnages were continuing in 1967, and said they were concerned about the possible introduction of new weapons which could improve NVN's air and coastal defenses and pose an offensive threat to friendly forces and installations in SVN. They called for an immediate expansion of the bombing

...to include attacks on all airfields, all port complexes, all land and sea lines of communication in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, and mining of coastal harbors and coastal waters. 115/

The intensified bombing should be initiated during the favorable May-September weather season, before the onset of poor flying conditions over NVN. The bombing should include "target systems whose destruction would have the most far-reaching effect on NVN's capability to fight," such as electric power plants, ports, airfields, additional barracks and supply depots, and transportation facilities. The 30-mile circle around Hanoi should be shrunk to 10 miles and the 10-mile circle around Haiphong should be reduced to 4. Armed reconnaissance should be authorized throughout NVN and adjacent coastal waters except in populated areas, the China buffer zone, and the Hanoi/Haiphong circles. Inland waterways should be mined all the way up to the China buffer zone. 116/

On May 24 General Wheeler provided his views on two alternative courses of action in response to a request from Vance: (1) add 250,000 troops in SVN and intensify the bombing against NVN, and (2) hold the troop increase to 70,000 more and hold the bombing below 20° unless required by military necessity -- or, "if necessary to provide an opportunity for a negotiated settlement," stop it altogether. In his memorandum to the SecDef, to which a lengthy Joint Staff study of the alternatives was attached, General Wheeler said that a partial or complete cessation of strikes against NVN would allow NVN to recoup its losses, expand its stockpiles, and continue to support the war from a sanctuary. This would be costly to friendly forces and prolong the war. It could be interpreted as a NVN victory -- an "aerial Dien Bien Phu." 117/

The Chairman recommended instead the adoption of the JCS program for the conduct of the war, which included air strikes to reduce external aid to NVN, destroy its in-country resources, and disrupt movement into the South. The strikes would be designed to "isolate the

Hanoi-Haiphong logistic base" by interdicting the LOCs and concurrently attacking the "remaining reservoir of war-supporting resources" and the flow of men and materials to the South. The import of war-sustaining material would be obstructed and reduced, movement on rails, roads, and inland waterways would be degraded, "air terminals" would be disrupted, storage areas and stockpiles would be destroyed, and movement South would be curtailed. The campaign would impair NVN's ability to control, direct, and support the insurgency in the South. NVN would be under increasing pressure to seek a political rather than a military solution to the war. 118/

At the end of May the Chiefs sent the Secretary their response to the DPM. The Chairman sent McNamara a memo with a line-in, line-out factual correction of the DPM that did not comment on policy. Its most significant change was to raise the total troop figure in option A (Westy's 4-2/3 Division request) from 200,000 to 250,000. 119/ On the 1st of June the Secretary received the Chiefs' collective views on the substantive policy recommendations of the DPM. As might have been expected, they were the stiffest kind of condemnation of the proposals. The JCS complained that the DPM passed off option A and its supporting arguments as the views of the military when in fact they were a distortion of those views,

Course A is an extrapolation of a number of proposals which were recommended separately but not in combination or as interpreted in the DPM. The combination force levels, deployments, and military actions of Course A do not accurately reflect the positions or recommendations of COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, or the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The positions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which provide a better basis against which to compare other alternatives, are set forth in JCSM-218-67, JCSM 286-67, and JCSM-288-67. 120/

While they may have been annoyed at what they felt was a misrepresentation of their views on the best course of action for the U.S., the Chiefs were outraged by the compromising of U.S. objectives in the DPM:

Objectives. The preferred course of action addressed in the DPM (Course B) is not consistent with NSAM 288 or with the explicit public statements of US policy and objectives enumerated in Part I, Appendix A, and in Appendix B. The DPM would, in effect, limit US objectives to merely guaranteeing the South Vietnamese the right to determine their own future on the one hand and offsetting the effect of North Vietnam's application of force in South Vietnam on the other. The United States would remain committed to these two objectives only so long as the South Vietnamese

continue to help themselves. It is also noted that the DFM contains no statement of military objectives to be achieved and that current US national, military, and political objectives are far more comprehensive and far-reaching. Thus:

a. The DFM fails to appreciate the full implications for the Free World of failure to achieve a successful resolution of the conflict in Southeast Asia.

b. Modification of present US objectives, as called for in the DFM, would undermine and no longer provide a complete rationale for our presence in South Vietnam or much of our effort over the past two years.

c. The positions of the more than 35 nations supporting the Government of Vietnam might be rendered untenable by such drastic changes in US policy. 121/

The strategy the DFM had proposed under option B was completely anathema to their view of how the war should be conducted. After having condemned the ground forces and strategy of the DFM as a recipe for a protracted and indecisive conflict, the Chiefs turned their guns on the recommended constriction of the air war to the DRV panhandle:

Military Strategy for Air/Naval War in the North.

The DFM stresses a policy which would concentrate air operations in the North Vietnamese "funnel" south of 20°. The concept of a "funnel" is misleading, since in fact the communists are supplying their forces in South Vietnam from all sides, through the demilitarized zone, Laos, the coast, Cambodia, and the rivers in the Delta. According to the DFM, limiting the bombing to south of 20° might result in increased negotiation opportunities with Hanoi. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that such a new self-imposed restraint resulting from this major change in strategy would most likely have the opposite effect. The relative immunity granted to the LOCs and distribution system outside the Panhandle would permit: (a) a rapid recovery from the damage sustained to date; (b) an increase in movement capability; (c) a reduced requirement for total supplies in the pipeline; (d) a concentration of air defenses into the Panhandle; and (e) a release of personnel and equipment for increased efforts in infiltration of South Vietnam. Also, it would relieve the Hanoi leadership from experiencing at first hand the pressures of recent air operations which foreign observers have reported. Any possible political advantages gained by confining our interdiction campaign to the Panhandle would be offset decisively by allowing North

Vietnam to continue an unobstructed importation of war material. Further, it is believed that such a drastic reduction in the scale of air operations against North Vietnam could only result in the strengthening of the enemy's resolve to continue the war. No doubt the reduction in scope of air operations would also be considered by many as a weakening of US determination and a North Vietnamese victory in the air war over northern North Vietnam. The combination of reduced military pressures against North Vietnam with stringent limitations of our operations in South Vietnam, as suggested in Course B, appears even more questionable conceptually. It would most likely strengthen the enemy's ultimate hope of victory and lead to a redoubling of his efforts. 122/

Completing their rejection of the DPM's analysis, the Chiefs argued that properly explained a mobilization of the reserves and a full U.S. commitment to winning the war would be supported by the American public and would bolster not harm U.S. prestige abroad. The Chiefs did not think the likelihood of a Chinese intervention in response to their proposed actions was high and they completely discounted a Soviet entry into the hostilities in any active role. Summing up their alarm at the complete turnabout in U.S. policy suggested by the DPM, the Chiefs stated:

Most of the foregoing divergencies between the DPM and the stated policies, objectives, and concepts are individually important and are reason for concern. However, when viewed collectively, an alarming pattern emerges which suggests a major realignment of US objectives and intentions in Southeast Asia without regard for the long-term consequences. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are not aware of any decision to retract the policies and objectives which have been affirmed by responsible officials many times in recent years. Thus, the DPM lacks adequate foundation for further consideration. 123/

With the expectation that the implementation of course B would result in a prolongation of the war, a reinforcing of Hanoi's belief in ultimate victory, and greatly increased costs for the U.S. in lives and treasure, the Chiefs recommended that:

- a. The DPM NOT be forwarded to the President.
- b. The US national objective as expressed in NSAM 288 be maintained, and the national policy and objectives for Vietnam as publicly stated by US officials be reaffirmed.

c. The military objective, concept, and strategy for the conduct of the war in Vietnam as stated in JCSM-218-67 be approved by the Secretary of Defense.

They were evidently unaware that the President had already seen the DFM ten days before. 124/

At about this time, the latter part of May, CIA also produced an estimate of the consequences of several different U.S. actions, including de-escalating the bombing. The actions considered were essentially those of the DFM: increase U.S. troop levels in SVN by another 200,000; intensify the bombing against military, industrial, and transportation targets; intensify the bombing plus interdict the harbors; or level off rather than increase troop commitments; and reduce rather than intensify the bombing. 125/

The tone of this estimate was not quite as favorable to further bombing or quite as unfavorable to de-escalation as the January CIA analysis had been. The estimate said that NVN was counting upon winning in the South, and was willing to absorb considerable damage in the North so long as the prospects were good there. More intensive bombing was therefore not likely to be the decisive element in breaking Hanoi's will and was not likely to force Hanoi to change its attitude toward negotiations:

Short of a major invasion or nuclear attack, there is probably no level of air or naval actions against North Vietnam which Hanoi has determined in advance would be so intolerable that the war had to be stopped. 126/

The pressure would be greater if, in addition, NVN's ports were closed. If, as was most likely, the USSR did not accept the challenge and NVN was forced to rely primarily on rail transport across China, and if, as a consequence, the situation in NVN gradually deteriorated, it was "conceivable" that NVN would choose to negotiate or otherwise terminate the war; but even this was unlikely unless the war in the South was also deteriorating seriously. 127/

As for reducing the bombing by restricting it to southern NVN, it would depend upon the circumstances:

In some circumstances North Vietnam would attribute this to the pressure of international opinion and domestic criticism, and it would confirm the view that the US would not persist. This view might be dispelled if the US made it clear that the bombing was being redirected to raise the cost of moving men and supplies into the South; and even more if the US indicated it intended to increase US forces in the South and take other action to block or reduce infiltration from North Vietnam. 128/

William Bundy at State drafted comments on the DPM on May 30 and circulated them at State and Defense. In his rambling and sometimes contradictory memo, Bundy dealt mainly with the nature and scope of the U.S. commitment -- as expressed in the DPM and as he saw it. He avoided any detailed analysis of the two military options and focused his attention on the strategic reasons for American involvement; the objectives we were after; and the terms under which we could consider closing down the operation. His memo began with his contention that:

The gut point can almost be summed up in a pair of sentences. If we can get a reasonably solid GVN political structure and GVN performance at all levels, favorable trends could become really marked over the next 18 months, the war will be won for practical purposes at some point, and the resulting peace will be secured. On the other hand, if we do not get these results from the GVN and the South Vietnamese people; no amount of US effort will achieve our basic objective in South Viet-Nam--a return to the essential provisions of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and a reasonably stable peace for many years based on these Accords.

It is this view of the central importance of the South that dominates the remainder of Bundy's memo. But his own thinking was far from clear about how the U.S. should react to a South Vietnamese failure for at the end of it he wrote:

None of the above decides one other question clearly implicit in the DOD draft. What happens if "the country ceases to help itself." If this happens in the literal sense, if South Viet-Nam performs so badly that it simply is not going to be able to govern itself or to resist the slightest internal pressure, then we would agree that we can do nothing to prevent this. But the real underlying question is to what extent we tolerate imperfection, even gross imperfection, by the South Vietnamese while they are still under the present grinding pressure from Hanoi and the NLF.

This is a tough question. What do we do if there is a military coup this summer and the elections are aborted? There would then be tremendous pressure at home and in Europe to the effect that this negated what we were fighting for, and that we should pull out.

But against such pressure we must reckon that the stakes in Asia will remain. After all, the military rule, even in

peacetime, in Thailand, Indonesia, and Burma. Are we to walk away from the South Vietnamese, at least as a matter of principle, simply because they failed in what was always conceded to be a courageous and extremely difficult effort to become a true democracy during a guerrilla war? 130/

Bundy took pointed issue with the DPM's reformulation of U.S. objectives. Starting with the DPM's discussion of U.S. larger interests in Asia, Bundy argued that:

In Asian eyes, the struggle is a test case, and indeed much more black-and-white than even we ourselves see it. The Asian view bears little resemblance to the breast-beating in Europe or at home. Asians would quite literally be appalled -- and this includes India -- if we were to pull out from Viet-Nam or if we were to settle for an illusory peace that produced Hanoi control over all Viet-Nam in short order.

In short, our effort in Viet-Nam in the past two years has not only prevented the catastrophe that would otherwise have unfolded but has laid a foundation for a progress that now appears truly possible and of the greatest historical significance. 131/

Having disposed of what he saw as a misinterpretation of Asian sentiment and U.S. interests there, Bundy now turned to the DPM's attempt to minimize the U.S. commitment in Vietnam. He opposed the DPM language because in his view it dealt too heavily with our military commitment to get NVA off the South Vietnamese back, and not enough with the equally important commitment, to assure that "the political board in South Vietnam is not tilted to the advantage of the NLF." 132/ Bundy's conception of the U.S. commitment was twofold:

--To prevent any imposed political role for the NLF in South Vietnamese political life, and specifically the coalition demanded by point 3 of Hanoi's Four Points, or indeed any NLF part in government or political life that is not safe and acceptable voluntarily to the South Vietnamese Government and people.

--To insist in our negotiating position that "regroupees," that is, people originally native to South Viet-Nam who went North in 1954 and returned from 1959 onward, should be expelled as a matter of principle in the settlement. Alternatively, such people could remain in South Viet-Nam if, but only if, the South Vietnamese Government itself was prepared to receive them back under a reconciliation concept, which would provide in essence that they must be prepared to accept peaceful

political activity under the Constitution (as the reconciliation appeal now does). This latter appears to be the position of the South Vietnamese Government, which--as Tran Van Do has just stated in Geneva--argues that those sympathetic to the Northern system of government should go North, while those prepared to accept the Southern system of government may stay in the South. Legally, the first alternative is sound, in that Southerners who went North in 1954 became for all legal and practical purposes Northern citizens and demonstrated their allegiance. But if the South Vietnamese prefer the second alternative, it is in fact exactly comparable to the regroupment provisions of the 1954 Accords, and can legally be sustained. But in either case the point is that the South Vietnamese are not obliged to accept as citizens people whose total pattern of conduct shows that they would seek to overthrow the structure of government by force and violence. 133/

The remainder of Bundy's comments were addressed to importance of this last point. The U.S. could not consider withdrawing its forces until not only the North Vietnamese troops but also the regroupees had returned to the North. Nowhere in his comments does he specifically touch on the merits of the two military options, but his arguments all seem to support the tougher of the two choices (his earlier support of restricting the bombing thus seems paradoxical). He was, it is clear, less concerned with immediate specific decisions on a military phase of the war than with the long term consequences of this major readjustment of American sights in Southeast Asia.

The only other reaction on the DPM from the State Department was a belated memo from Katzenbach to Vance on June 8. Katzenbach's criticisms were more focused on specific language and conclusions than Bundy's. In general they did not reject the analysis of the DPM, however. With respect to the bombing, Katzenbach observed that, "...we ought to consider concentrating on infiltration routes throughout North Viet-Nam and leaving 'strategic' targets, particularly those in urban areas alone." 134/ This departed slightly from the Bundy-Rostow-McNaughton thesis of confining the bombing to the panhandle infiltration network. As to the DPM's effort to circumscribe U.S. objectives in the war, Katzenbach achieved a new low in understatement, "I agree with the arguments for limited objectives. But these are not easy to define." 135/ In short, if the intent of the DOD draft had been to precipitate an Administration-wide debate on the fundamental issues of the U.S. involvement, it had certainly achieved its purpose.

5. The McNamara Bombing Options

Long before McNamara received these views from the Chiefs, CIA and State, however, he had requested comments from several quarters on two possible bombing programs. Perhaps reflecting a cool Presidential reaction to the DPM proposals, Secretary McNamara, on May 20, asked the JCS, the CIA, and the two military services involved in the ROLLING THUNDER program, the Air Force and the Navy, to study the question. He referred to the "controversy" surrounding the program, said that several alternatives had been suggested, and asked for an analysis of the two most promising ones:

(1) Concentrate on LOCs in the Panhandle area, Route Packages 1, 2, and 3, and terminate bombing in the rest of North Vietnam unless there is reconstruction of important fixed targets destroyed by prior raids or unless new military actions appear; or

(2) Terminate bombing against fixed targets not directly associated with LOCs in Route Packages 6a and 6b /the northeast quadrant/ and simultaneously expand armed reconnaissance in Route Packages 6a and 6b by authorizing strikes against all LOCs except within 8 miles of the centers of Hanoi and Haiphong. This would undoubtedly require continuous strikes against MIG aircraft on all airfields. 136/

Under alternative (2) above, the Secretary provided two alternate assumptions: (a) that strikes against the ports and port facilities were precluded, and (b) that every effort was made to deny importation from the sea. 137/

The Secretary asked each addressee to analyze the two main alternatives plus any others they considered worth discussing. He asked, for each of the alternatives, the effect it would have on reducing the flow of men and material to SVN, on losses of pilots and aircraft, and on the risk of "increased military pressure" from the USSR or China. He also asked that the studies be carried out independently, and requested reports by 1 June. 138/

The CIA reply, a "Dear Bob" memo from Helms, arrived as requested on June 1st. In his cover memo Helms stated that the goal of interdicting supplies to the South was essentially beyond reach:

In general, we do not believe that any of the programs presented in your memorandum is capable of reducing the flow of military and other essential goods sufficiently to affect the war in the South or to decrease Hanoi's determination to persist in the war. 139/

The CIA also went into some detail on Soviet and Chinese responses to bombing north versus south of 20°. The Chinese would attribute any setback to a lack of will in the face of rising domestic and international criticism and would continue to egg NVN on. The Soviets would construe it in this light, also, but would be relieved that the U.S. had broken the cycle of escalation, and if the U.S. accompanied the setback with political initiatives toward negotiations might even press Hanoi to respond. As to Hanoi,

As to concentrating the bombing north instead of south of 20°, neither the open or the closed port variants "could obstruct or reduce North Vietnam's import of military or war-supporting materials and its ability to carry on the war." NVN now had the capacity to import about 14,000 tons of goods a day over its main rail, road, and inland water routes; and it currently imported about 5,300 tons a day. An optimum interdiction program against all means of land and water transportation could "at most" reduce transport capacity to about 3,900 tons a day, or about 25 percent below present levels. However, if NVN eliminated all but essential military and economic goods, it would need only about 3000 tons a day, a volume of traffic which could still be handled comfortably. 141/

Package I, II, and III provides such a deep cushion that it is almost certain that no interdiction program can neutralize the logistics target system to the extent necessary to reduce the flow of men and supplies to South Vietnam below their present levels. 140/

Based on the results of ROLLING THUNDER to date and on the nature of the logistic target system, CIA said, concentrating the bombing in southern NVN would undoubtedly increase the costs of maintaining the LOCs and degrade their capacity "somewhat further," but could not be expected to reduce the flow of men and material below present levels. This was because of the excess capacity of the road network and NVN's impressive ability to maintain and improve it. It cited the example of the traffic from NVN through Mu Gia pass into Laos. During the 1965-1966 dry season, truck traffic on the route averaged 28 trucks or about 85 tons of supplies a day, a level of traffic which used it to less than 20 percent of its then theoretical capacity of 450 tons a day, and, since the route had been improved, less than 10 percent of its present capacity of 740 tons a day. The rest of the road network had also been expanded in spite of the bombing. Some 340 miles of alternative routes were built in southern NVN during 1966 and more than 400 miles of new roads were constructed in Laos. Even if the bombing could reduce road capacities by 50 percent, the capacity remaining would still be at least five times greater than required to move supplies at the current rate. In summary:

Whether or not Hanoi responded to these initiatives would depend on its view of the military outlook in the South, and on whether it believed that a move toward negotiation would bring success nearer. 142/

Bombing north of 20° without closing the ports would not bring on new or different Chinese or Soviet responses except for the attacks on airfields. These might lead to greater Chinese involvement, especially if NVN transferred air defense operations to bases in China. If the ports were closed, however, there would be a direct challenge to the USSR. While it was unlikely that the USSR (or China, for that matter) would undertake new military actions, it would make every effort to continue supplying NVN and would attempt to put maximum political pressures on the U.S. China's leverage with Hanoi would grow, and China would urge Hanoi to continue the war more vigorously than ever. 143/

The formal JCS response to the SecDef's questions on bombing north versus south of the 20th parallel, quite apart from troop levels, was submitted on 2 June. It was predictably cool toward restricting the bombing to southern NVN, a good deal warmer toward continuing the bombing in northern NVN, and warmest by far toward proceeding from there to close the ports. 144/

The JCS opposed any cutback on bombing north of the 20th parallel on grounds that it would decrease the effectiveness of interdiction and make things easier for NVN. It would reduce the distance over which the flow of men and supplies was subject to attack. It would provide NVN free and rapid access down to Thanh Hoa, decreasing transport time, rolling stock requirements, pipeline assets, and man-hours for moving supplies South. It would release resources currently required north of 20°. It would enable NVN to accelerate the import of weapons and munitions, strengthen the Panhandle defenses, and increase U.S. attrition. The U.S. action would be interpreted as yielding to pressure and weakening resolve; NVN would be sure to claim victory and press for greater concessions as a price for any settlement. 145/

The JCS also argued that terminating strikes against non-LOC targets in the north and switching to expanded armed reconnaissance there would have the disadvantage of not maintaining the level of damage achieved with respect to fixed installations and industry, but would have the advantages of adding to NVN's difficulties -- from interruptions of the LOCs, having to resort to inferior means of transport, shifting its management and labor resources, and the like. However, leaving the ports open would permit NVN to absorb the damage and adjust to the campaign. With the ports open, NVN could continue to handle imports even if the LOC strikes were successful. With the ports closed, on the other hand, sustained attack on the roads and railroads would become militarily

profitable, and the concurrent and sustained interdiction of imports would become possible. 146/

A cryptic pencil note on copy 4 of this JCSM initialled by McNaughton indicated, "all incorporated in my 6/3/67 draft," and listed "Main issues" as "(1) Total pressure (2) pilot losses (3) U.S. 'failure'." 147/ It is hard to know exactly what this could mean since the JCS position was certainly not being adopted by the Secretary. Moreover, there is no record of a 3 June draft. We will discuss a later draft below, but it does not endorse the JCS position.

The Secretary of the Navy responded to Secretary McNamara's questions with an attempt to construct models of the alternative north and south of 20° target systems and war game attacks against them. It concluded that an interdiction effort in southern NVN concentrated on specified areas where traffic was already constricted by the terrain would be more effective than the current program, "but by an uncertain increment over an undefinable base." U.S. losses would be lower initially, but would rise in time because NVN could be expected to redeploy anti-aircraft defenses south. The manpower strain on NVN would not be as at present, however, with the cessation of attacks on the high-value targets in the northern part of the country. 148/

The Navy analysis also concluded that a greater interdiction effort north of 20°, without closing the ports, could not be carried out with available resources "in a manner producing results better than the present effort." The program would create greater demand for repair and bypass construction, but it was not clear that it would have a major effect on NVN's capability to import goods and ship them to SVN. This alternative would be the most expensive in U.S. aircraft and aircrews and would provide the least return in reducing NVN supplies to SVN. 149/

Closing the ports in addition to stepping up the armed reconnaissance effort in northern NVN would have a substantial effect on imports at first but in time NVN could switch to other LOCs. The cost would be mainly in efficiency. Reducing imports below NVN's minimum requirements was probably beyond the current capability of the bombing campaign. 150/

The Air Force response to Secretary McNamara was given on 3 June. Cutting back the bombing to below the 20th parallel would permit NVN to increase the input of men and supplies at the top of the "funnel" with the same or less effort than it was now expending, and would result in a greater inflow into SVN. U.S. losses might go down temporarily, but NVN would shift its anti-aircraft resources southward, and losses would rise again. The cutback would reduce the risk of Chinese or Soviet involvement and might conceivably even start a process

of mutual de-escalation, but it was more likely to be taken as a sign of U.S. weakness and encourage Hanoi to take a still stronger stand. 151/

Expanded armed reconnaissance in northern NVN, especially if coupled with denying or inhibiting importation through Haiphong,

...would have a substantial effect on NVN economy and logistic net and would...force enough additional diversion of resources to reduce NVN infiltration and support. 152/

However, closure of Haiphong -- which might not shut off all access from the sea -- would carry unacceptable risks of wider war, an allout attack on the railroads and roads from China was preferable, and would still complicate NVN's logistic problems. Still more preferable, on balance, was maintaining the present level of operations:

Because closure of Haiphong is probably not acceptable, what would otherwise be a reasonable price in terms of aircraft loss for greatly reducing the inflow along the northern roads and railroads becomes an unreasonable loss in the presence of a possible increase of sea import....This option is not, without Haiphong port denial, an optimum use of air-power. It is a war of attrition, forced by the risk of a wider war or other actions by the Soviets if we do try to close Haiphong. In that sense, it is analogous to the ground war in the South....153/

On June 9, Secretary of the Air Force Brown sent McNamara a supplemental memo in which he tried to make a case for interdiction bombing based on a statistical demonstration that it was the most important factor in explaining the difference between uninterdicted infiltration capability and actual infiltration. 154/

Thus, the responses to the SecDef's questions on bombing north versus south of the 20th parallel divided about evenly, with the JCS and the Air Force strongly opposed to a cutback to 20° and backing the more escalatory route, and the Navy and CIA concluding that interdiction either north or south was a difficult if not impossible goal but that a cutback would cost little.

6. The June 12th DPM

The Defense Department having fully explored the various air war options, attention within the Administration again focused on preparing a memorandum to the President, this time on strategy against North Vietnam alone. But other events and problems were intervening to consume the

time and energies of the Principles in early June. On June 5, the four-day Arab-Israeli War erupted to dominate all other problems during that week. The intensive diplomatic activity at the UN by the U.S. would heavily engage the President's attention and eventually lead to the Summit meeting with Soviet Premier Kosygin in Glassboro, N.J. later in the month. In the actual war in Vietnam, the one-day truce on Buddha's birthday, May 23rd, had produced such gross enemy violations that some intensification of the conflict ensued afterwards. Nevertheless in late May, Admiral Sharp was informed of the reimposition of the 10-mile prohibited zone around Hanoi. His response was predictable:

We have repeatedly sought to obtain authority for a systematic air campaign directed against carefully selected targets whose destruction and constant disruption would steadily increase the pressure on Hanoi. It seems unfortunate that just when the pressure is increasing by virtue of such an air campaign, and the weather is optimum over northern NVN, we must back off. 155/

On June 11, however, the Kep airfield was struck for the first time with ten MIGs reportedly destroyed or damaged. Prior to that, on June 2, an unfortunate case of bad aiming had resulted in a Soviet ship, the Turkestan, being struck by cannon fire from a U.S. plane trying to silence a North Vietnamese AAA battery. The Soviets lodged a vigorous protest with the U.S., but we initially denied the allegation only to acknowledge the accident later (on June 20 to be exact just three days before the Glassboro meeting and presumably to improve its atmosphere).

In Washington, in addition to the time consuming Middle East crisis, Administration officials were still far from consensus on the question of whether to add another major increment to U.S. ground forces in South Vietnam and to call up the reserves to reconstitute depleted forces at home and elsewhere. Indeed, as we shall see, it appears that the troop question went unresolved longer than the air strategy problem. The issues must have been discussed in a general review of the Vietnam question at a meeting at State on June 8 in Katzenbach's office, but no record of the discussion was preserved. A two-page outline of positions entitled "Disagreements" and preserved in McNaughton's files does, however, give a very good idea of where the principle Presidential advisers stood on the major issues at that point:

DISAGREEMENTS -

1. Westmoreland-McNamara on whether Course A would end the war sooner.

2. Vance-CIA on the ability of NVN to meet force increases in the South.

3. Wheeler-Vance on the military effectiveness of cutting back bombing to below the 20th Parallel, and on whether it would save US casualties.

4. CIA believes that the Chinese might not intervene if an invasion of NVN did not seem to threaten the Hanoi regime. Vance states an invasion would cause Chinese intervention. Vance believes that the Chinese could decide to intervene if the ports were mined; CIA does not mention this possibility.

5. CIA and the Mission disagree with Vance on whether we have achieved the cross-over point and, more broadly, on how well the "big war" is going. One CIA analysis, contradicted in a latter /sic/ CIA statement, expresses the view that the enemy's strategic position has improved over the past year.

6. CIA-INR on whether Hanoi seeks to wear us down (CIA) or seeks more positive victories in the South (INR).

7. INR believes that the bombing has had a greater effect than does CIA.

8. Vance and CIA say we have struck all worthwhile targets in NVN except the ports. Wheeler disagrees.

9. CIA cites inflationary pressures and the further pressure that would be caused by Course A. Vance says that these pressures are under control and could be handled if Course A were adopted.

10. Rostow believes that a call-up of reserves would show Hanoi that we mean business and have more troops coming-- Vance believes that a reserve call-up would lead to divisive debate which would encourage Hanoi. Would not the call-up indicate that we had manpower problems?

11. Bundy-Vance disagreements on the degree to which we have contained China, whether our commitment ends if the SVNese don't help themselves, the NLF role in political life, regroupes, and our and Hanoi's rights to lend support to friendly forces in SVN after a settlement. 156/

Another indication of what may have transpired in the June 8 meeting is an unsigned outline for a policy paper (probably done in Bundy's office) in McNaughton's files. This ambitious document suggests that U.S. goals in the conflict include leaving behind a stable, democratic government; leaving behind conditions of stable peace in Asia; persuading the DRV to give up its aggression; and neutralizing the internal security threat in the South. All this to be done without creating an American satellite, generating anti-American sentiment, destroying the social fabric in the South or alienating other countries. 157/ Strategies considered to achieve the objectives included the Westmoreland plan for 200,000 men with a reserve callup (10 disadvantages listed against it); limiting the increase to 30,000 men but without a reserve callup; "enough US forces to operate effectively against provincial main force units and to reinforce I Corps and the DMZ area," with a reserve callup; and no change from current force levels. Options against North Vietnam included: (A) expanded air attacks on military, industrial and LOC targets including mining the harbors; (B) stopping the bombing north of the 20th parallel except for restrikes; (C) invasion; and (D) the barrier. The section ends cryptically, "Our over-all strategy must consist of a combination of these." 158/ The last paragraph of the outline deals with the intended strategy against the North:

...the object is to cut the North off from the South as much as possible, and to shake Hanoi from its obdurate position. Concentrate on shaking enemy morale in both the South and North by limiting Hanoi's ability to support the forces in South Viet-Nam.

a. A barrier, if it will work, or

b. Concentrate bombing on lines of communication throughout NVN, thus specifically concentrating on infiltration but not running into the problem we have had and will have with bombing oriented towards 'strategic' targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area. By continuing to bomb throughout NVN in this manner we would indicate neither a lessening of will nor undue impatience. 159/

The broad outlines of the eventual decision on bombing that would emerge from this prolonged debate are contained in this cryptic outline in early June.

At Defense, McNaughton began once again to pull together a DPM for McNamara, this time devoted exclusively to the air war. A June 12 version preserved in McNaughton's files appears to be the final

form it took, although whether it was shown to the President is not clear. McNaughton's draft rejected the more fulsome expressions of the U.S. objective advanced by the Chiefs and Bundy in favor of following a more closely defined set of goals:

The limited over-all US objective, in terms of the narrow US commitment and not of wider US preferences, is to take action (so long as they continue to help themselves) to see that the people of South Vietnam are permitted to determine their own future. Our commitment is to stop (or generously to offset when we cannot stop) North Vietnamese military intervention in the South, so that "the board will not be tilted" against Saigon in an internal South Vietnamese contest for control...The sub-objectives, at which our bombing campaign in the North has always been aimed, are these:

--(1) To retaliate and to lift the morale of the people in the South, including Americans, who are being attacked by agents of the North;

--(2) To add to the pressure on Hanoi to end the war;

--(3) To reduce the flow and/or to increase the cost of infiltrating men and materiel from North to South. 160/

In light of these objectives, three alternative air war programs were examined in the memo. They were:

ALTERNATIVE A. Intensified attack on the Hanoi-Haiphong logistical base. Under this Alternative, we would continue attacks on enemy installations and industry and would conduct an intensified, concurrent and sustained effort against all elements of land, sea and air lines of communication in North Vietnam -- especially those entering and departing the Hanoi-Haiphong areas. Foreign shipping would be "shouldered out" of Haiphong by a series of air attacks that close in on the center of the port complex. The harbor and approaches would be mined, forcing foreign shipping out into the nearby estuaries for offloading by lighterage. Intensive and systematic armed reconnaissance would be carried out against the roads and railroads from China (especially the northeast railroad), against coastal shipping and coastal transshipment locations, and against all other land lines of communications. The eight major operational airfields would be systematically attacked, and the deep-water ports of Cam Pha and Hon Gai would be struck or mined as required. ALTERNATIVE A could be pursued full-force between now and September (thereafter the onset of unfavorable weather conditions would seriously impair operations).

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ALTERNATIVE B. Emphasis on the infiltration routes south of the 20th Parallel. Under this alternative, the dominant emphasis would be, not on preventing material from flowing into North Vietnam (and thus not on "economic pressure on the regime), but on preventing military men and materiel from flowing out of the North into the South. We would terminate bombing in the Red River basin except for occasional sorties (perhaps 3%) -- those necessary to keep enemy air defenses and damage-repair crews positioned there and to keep important fixed targets knocked out. The same total number of sorties envisioned under ALTERNATIVE A--together with naval gunfire at targets ashore and afloat and mining of inland waterways, estuaries and coastal waters -- would be concentrated in the neck of North Vietnam, between 17° and 20°, through which all land infiltration must pass and in which the "extended battle zone" north of the DMZ lies. The effort would be intensive and sustained, designed especially to saturate choke points and to complement similar new intensive interdiction efforts in adjacent areas in Laos and near the 17th Parallel inside South Vietnam.

ALTERNATIVE C. Extension of the current program. This alternative would be essentially a refinement of the currently approved program and therefore a compromise between ALTERNATIVE A and ALTERNATIVE b. Under it, while avoiding attacks within the 10-mile prohibited zone around Hanoi and strikes at or mining of the ports, we would conduct a heavy effort against all other land, sea, and air lines of communication. Important fixed targets would be kept knocked out; intensive, sustained and systematic armed reconnaissance would be carried out against the roads and railroads and coastal shipping throughout the country; and the eight major airfields would be systematically attacked. The total number of sorties would be the same as under the other two alternatives. 161/

The positions of the various members of the Defense establishment with respect to the three alternatives were:

Mr. Vance and I recommend ALTERNATIVE B.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend ALTERNATIVE A.

The Secretary of the Navy recommends ALTERNATIVE B.

The Secretary of the Air Force recommends ALTERNATIVE C modified to add some targets (especially LOC targets) to the present list and to eliminate others.

The Director of the CIA does not make a recommendation. The CIA judgment is that none of the alternatives is capable of decreasing Hanoi's determination to persist in the war or of reducing the flow of goods sufficiently to affect the war in the South. 162/

The arguments for and against the three alternatives were developed at considerable length in the memo. The summary gave the following rationale for the McNamara-Vance position:

In the memorandum, Mr. Vance and I:

--Oppose the JCS program (ALTERNATIVE A) on grounds that it would neither substantially reduce the flow of men and supplies to the South nor pressure Hanoi toward settlement, that it would be costly in American lives and in domestic and world opinion, and that it would run serious risks of enlarging the war into one with the Soviet Union and China, leaving us a few months from now more frustrated and with almost no choice but even further escalation.

--Oppose mere refinement of the present program (ALTERNATIVE C) on grounds that it would involve most of the costs and some of the risks of ALTERNATIVE A with less chance that ALTERNATIVE A of either interdicting supplies or moving Hanoi toward settlement.

--Recommend concentration of the bulk of our efforts on infiltration routes south of 20° (ALTERNATIVE B) because this course would interdict supplies as effectively as the other alternatives, would cost the least in pilots' lives, and would be consistent with effort to move toward negotiations. 163/

These views were stated in somewhat expanded form in the concluding paragraphs of the DPM:

I am convinced that, within the limits to which we can go with prudence, "strategic" bombing of North Vietnam will at best be unproductive. I am convinced that mining the ports would not only be unproductive but very costly in domestic and world support and very dangerous -- running high risks of enlarging the war as the program is carried out, frustrated and with no choice but to escalate further. At the same time, I am doubtful that bombing the infiltration routes north or south of 20° will put a meaningful

ceiling on men or materiel entering South Vietnam. Nevertheless, I recommend ALTERNATIVE B (which emphasizes bombing the area between 17° and 20°) because (1) it holds highest promise of serving a military purpose, (2) it will cost the least in pilots' lives, and (3) it is consistent with efforts to move toward negotiations.

Implicit in the recommendation is a conviction that nothing short of toppling the Hanoi regime will pressure North Vietnam to settle so long as they believe they have a chance to win the "war of attrition" in the South, a judgment that actions sufficient to topple the Hanoi regime will put us into war with the Soviet Union and China, and a belief that a shift to ALTERNATIVE B can be timed and handled in such a way as to gain politically while not endangering the morale of our fighting men. 164/

There is no evidence as to whether the President saw this memo or not. If he did, any decision on bombing was probably deferred to be made in conjunction with the decision on ground forces. Moreover, the middle of June was heavily taken up with the question of whether or not to meet Kosygin, and once that was decided with preparing for the confrontation. Therefore, no decision on bombing was forthcoming during June. What is significant is the coalescence of civilian opinion against the JCS recommended escalation.

7. The RT 57 Decision -- No Escalation

There is some evidence that in spite of the burden of other problems, some attention was also being devoted to the possibility of negotiations and U.S. positions in the event they should occur. 165/ Bundy had had an extensive interview with the recently defected Charge of the Hungarian Embassy in Washington who had confirmed that at no time during any of the past peace efforts with the DRV had there been any North Vietnamese softening of its position. 166/ This view of the current situation was challenged, however, by INR in a report at mid-month. They noted that, "Several recent indicators suggest that Hanoi may again be actively reviewing the issue of negotiations. Some of the indicators show possible flexibility; others show continuing hardness." 167/ In retrospect these were hardly more than straws in the wind. In early July they would become more immediate, however, with a Canadian proposal for redemilitarization of the DMZ and a bombing halt (see below). The June review of the situation no doubt was done with a view to determining what possibilities might exist if the President met with Kosygin as he eventually did.

On June 17, Ambassador Bunker added his voice to the chorus already doubting the effectiveness of the bombing in interdicting the flow of North Vietnamese support for the war. In his first major pronouncement on the subject he told Rusk in an "eyes only" cable:

Aerial bombardment has been helpful in greatly increasing the difficulties of infiltration by the NVN forces and in keeping them supplied. It has also destroyed or damaged a large amount of the NVN infrastructure. Aerial bombardment, however, though extremely important, has neither interdicted infiltration nor broken the will of the NVN and it is doubtful that it can accomplish either. 168/

Continuing his analysis, he stated:

It seems apparent therefore that the crux of the military problem is to choke off NVN infiltration.

* * * * *

When the infiltration is choked off, it should be possible to suspend bombings at least for a period and thereby determine whether there is substance to the statement in many quarters that Hanoi would then come to negotiations. If the bombings were stopped it would at least call their bluff. 169/

In the remainder of this cable he advanced the arguments for an anti-infiltration barrier even in view of the political problems it would create. Disillusioned, like so many others, with the bombing, he pinned his hopes on this untried military alternative to "choke off the infiltration."

A few days later, CINCPAC, undoubtedly aware of the air war debate in Washington and the direction in which it was tending, sent a long cable to the Chiefs evaluating the results of recent months in the ROLLING THUNDER program, results which argued for intensification of the bombing he felt. Reviewing the history of the bombing since February, he noted the curtailment of sorties during the early spring because of bad weather but stated that, "Starting in late April and over a period of five weeks, the air campaign in the NE quadrant increased the level of damage in that area and the consequent stress on the Hanoi government more than during the entire previous ROLLING THUNDER program" 170/ In an apparent attempt to head off the arguments for limiting the bombing to below the 20th parallel, Admiral Sharp pointed out that the significant achievements in the NE quadrant in the previous two months had not been at the expense of sorties in the panhandle and, perhaps more importantly,

had experienced a declining aircraft loss rate compared with the previous year. The numbers of trucks, railroad cars, boats, etc., destroyed were offered as evidence of the effectiveness of bombing in interdicting the flow of supplies. No mention is made of the undiminished rate of that flow. The mining of the rivers south of 20° is also judged a success, although no evidence is offered to support the statement. After fulminating about the reimposition of the 10-mile restriction around Hanoi, CINCPAC notes the significant achievements of the last months -- all in terms of increased DRV defensive activity (MIG, SAM, AAA, etc.). In a peroration worthy of Billy Mitchell, CINCPAC summed up the achievements of the recent past and made the case for intensification:

...we believe that our targeting systems concept, our stepped up combat air effort over the Northeast and the continued high sortie rate applied against enemy infiltration is paying off. With the exception of RT 55 and RT 56, air power for the first time began to realize the sort of effectiveness of which it is capable. This effectiveness can be maximized if we can be authorized to strike the many important targets remaining.

We are at an important point in this conflict. We have achieved a position, albeit late in the game, from which a precisely executed and incisive air campaign against all the target systems will aggregate significant interrelated effects against the combined military, political, economic, and psychological posture of North Vietnam. In our judgment the enemy is now hurting and the operations to which we attribute this impact should be continued with widest latitude in planning and execution in the months of remaining good weather. 171

CINCPAC's arguments, however, were largely falling on deaf ears. The debate had resolved itself as between options B and C. On July 3, the energetic Secretary of the Air Force, Harold Brown, sent McNamara another long detailed memo supporting his preference for alternative C. Convinced that the bombing did have some utility in northern North Vietnam, Brown had sent supplementary memos to his 3 June basic reply on 9 and 16 June. His July memo compared the objectives of the two alternatives and noted that the only difference was that alternative C would somewhat impede the import of supplies into North Vietnam and would allot 20% of the available sorties north of 20° compared with 3% under alternative B. 172 The principle arguments for maintaining the northern attack were: (1) the fact that a substantial erosion of interdiction effectiveness would occur if it was curtailed; (2) the political irreversibility of de-escalation (and the current lack of diplomatic

reason for such an initiative); and (3) the declining loss rates of aircraft and pilots in Route Packages 4-6. The appeal of Brown's analysis, however, for McNamara must have clearly been its reliance on statistical data -- hard facts. This is now Brown argued that ending the northern sorties would reduce interdiction effectiveness:

...the increase in weight of effort south of 20° from transferring 1500 sorties out of the area north of 20° is only about 21% (or about 13% increase of the total effort south of 20° and in Laos). Even if there is no law of diminishing returns south of 20°, for that overall increase to compensate the decrease in effect north of 20° would require that the former be presently five times as effective as the latter. I believe there would be diminishing returns south of 20°, because there are no targets south of 20° which are now not struck for lack of availability of sorties. North of 20° the question is a different one. The damage to LOCs can be increased by increasing the weight of effort (and this has been done in the past few months). What we have not been able to measure well is the incremental effort this forces on the North Vietnamese, or the extent to which they could and would use it to increase infiltration if they did not have to expend it on keeping supplies flowing to the 20° line.

It can be argued that because the flow into SVN is a larger fraction of what passes through Route Packages I-III than it is of what passes through Route Packages IV-VI, an amount of materiel destroyed in the former area has more effect than the same amount destroyed in the latter. This is true, but to argue that sorties in the northern region are therefore less important overlooks the fact that this very gradient is established largely by the attrition throughout the LOC. In analogous transport or diffusion problems of this sort in the physical world (e.g., the diffusion of heat) it is demonstrable that interferences close to the source have a greater effect, not a lesser effect, than the same interferences close to the output. If the attacks on the LOCs north of 20° stopped, the flow of goods past 20° could easily be raised by far more than 20% and the 20% increase of attack south of 20° would nowhere near compensate for this.

One interesting observation about the NE LOC is that the enemy has expended a significant percentage of his total imports in executing military defensive operations for the NVN heartland. From 1 January 1967 through 19 June 1967, he has launched 1062 SAM missiles in Route Package VI. A record total of 556 surface-to-air missiles were fired at

US aircraft during the period 1 May through 31 May. This one month expenditure equates to 2600 metric tons in missile hardware (consumables used in delivering missiles to launch pad not considered). MIG jet fuel consumption for a one-month period is estimated to be approximately 7,500 metric tons (resources expended to accomplish delivery not included). AAA munitions-firing equates to approximately 18,000 metric tons per month. Based on the CIA estimate of 5300 metric tons per day import rate, it is notable that the enemy is willing to use up to 15% of his total imports (by weight) in air defense. Most of this tonnage is used in defense of the industrial/economic structure in Route Packages V and VI. Even though 83% of all US attack sorties are flown in Route Packages I-IV, the enemy has not expended an equivalent amount of air defense consumables to protect this area. It can be assumed he would, which should add to the probability of increased losses to AAA/SA-2 south of 20°, if we greatly reduce attacks north of 20°. 173/

Brown's political point was familiar but had not been stated quite so precisely in this particular debate. Bombing was regarded by Brown as an indivisible blue chip to be exchanged in toto for some reciprocity by the North Vietnamese, a condition that did not seem likely in the present circumstances. Once stopped, the bombing would be extremely difficult to resume even if the DRV stepped up its infiltration and its half of the war generally. Moreover, the timing for such a halt was bad with the South Vietnamese elections only two months away.

With respect to the loss rates in the various parts of the country, Brown noted that losses in Route Packages IVA & B had declined dramatically over the preceding year, even though the DRV was expending far more resources to combat the sorties. If bombing were suspended north of 20° we could expect the DRV to redeploy much of its anti-aircraft resources into the panhandle thereby raising the currently low loss rates there. Since bombing effectiveness in the northern area was marginally more productive, the return pure aircraft loss overall would decline by such a geographical limitation of the air war. 174/

It is not clear what impact this line of analysis had on McNamara, but since he had previously gone on record in favor of alternative B, and no other new evidence or argumentation appears before the final decision in mid-July to adopt alternative C, it seems very likely that Brown's thinking swayed his oral recommendations to the President. Reinforcing Brown's analysis was the internal U.S. Government rejection

of a Canadian proposal to exchange a bombing halt for a redemilitarization of the DMZ. The Chiefs adamantly opposed the idea as a totally inequitable trade-off. We would sacrifice a valuable negotiating blue chip without commensurate gain (such as a cessation of DRV infiltration). 175/ With no other promising prospects for a diplomatic break-through, there was little reason on that score to suspend even a part of the bombing at that time.

The only other event that might have influenced the Secretary's thinking was his trip to Vietnam July 7-12. With a decision on the additional ground forces to be sent to Vietnam narrowing down, the President sent McNamara to Saigon to review the matter with General Westmoreland and reach agreement on a figure well below the 200,000 Westy had requested in March. As it turned out, the total new troops in Program #5 were about 25,000. In the briefings the Secretary received in Saigon, the Ambassador spoke briefly about the need for an effective interdiction system which he hoped we would find in the barrier. He reiterated most of the points he had made to Rusk by wire in June. 176/ CINCPAC's briefing on the air war began with the now standard self-justifications based on denied requests for escalation. The body of his presentation did contain some interesting new information, however. For instance, Admiral Sharp confirmed that the increased effort in the NE quadrant had not been at the expense of sorties elsewhere in North Vietnam or Laos. The decline in U.S. losses in the Red River valley was attributable in part to the declining effectiveness of North Vietnam's MIG, SA-2, and AAA defenses. This in turn was explained by better U.S. tactics, and, most importantly, new weapons and equipment like the WALLEYE guided bomb, the CBU-24 cluster bomb, the MK-36 Destructor and a much improved ECM capability. The rest of his presentation was given over to complaints about the unauthorized targets still on the JCS list and to the familiar muddled arguments for not stopping the northern bombing because it was pressuring Ho to behave as we wanted and because in some mysterious fashion it was interdicting infiltration, actual statistics in the South to the contrary notwithstanding. 177/

After 7th Air Force commander, General Momyer, had given a glowing detailed account of the success of the new tactics and weapons (a 4-fold increase in effectiveness against the NE RR in the previous year), and the 7th Fleet had described its air operations, CINCPAC summed up his arguments against any further limitations on the bombing. His closing point, on which he based recommendations, was that both sides were fighting both offensive and defensive wars. The DRV had the offensive initiative in the South but we were on the defensive. However,

The opposite holds for the air war in the north. Here we hold the initiative. We are conducting a strategic offensive, forcing the enemy into a defensive posture. He is forced to react at places and times of our choosing. If

we eliminate the only offensive element of our strategy, I do not see how we can expect to win. My recommendations are listed below. You will recognize that they are essentially the same actions proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Close the Haiphong Harbor to deep water shipping by bombing and/or mining.
2. Destroy six basic target systems (electricity, maritime ports, airfields, transportation, military complexes, war supporting industry).
3. Conduct integrated attacks against entire target base, including interdiction in NVN and Laos.

NECESSARY CHANGES AND ADDITIONS TO RT OPERATING RULES

1. Delete Hanoi 10 NM prohibited area.
2. Reduce Hanoi restricted area to 10 NM.
3. Reduce Haiphong restricted area to 4 NM.
4. Move the northern boundary of the special coastal armed recce area to include Haiphong area.
5. Authorize armed recce throughout NVN and coastal waters, (except populated areas, buffer zone, restricted areas).
6. Mine inland waterways to Chicom buffer zone as MK-36 destructors become available.
7. Extend Sea Dragon to Chicom buffer zone as forces become available.
8. Implement now to exploit good weather. 178/

McNamara's time in Vietnam, however, was mostly preoccupied with settling on the exact figure for troop increases. When he returned to Washington, he promptly met with the President and with his approval authorized the Program #5 deployments. He presumably also discussed with the President a decision on the next phase of the air campaign. There is no evidence of what he might have recommended at that stage. The decision was one that would have been made at the White House, so in any case the responsibility for it could be only partially his. Examination of the available documents does not reveal just how or when the decision on the

Secretary of Defense proposal was made, but it is clear what the decision was. It was to adopt alternative C---i.e., push onward with the bombing program essentially as it had been, continuing the bit-by-bit expansion of armed reconnaissance and striking a few new fixed targets in each ROLLING THUNDER series, but still holding back from closing the ports and such sensitive targets as the MIG airfields.

The next ROLLING THUNDER series, No. 57, was authorized on 20 July. Sixteen fixed targets were selected, including one airfield, one rail yard, two bridges, and 12 barracks and supply areas, all within the Hanoi and Haiphong circles but not within the forbidden 10-mile inner circle around the center of Hanoi against which Admiral Sharp had sailed. Armed reconnaissance was expanded along 23 road, rail, and waterway segments between the 30-mile and the 10-mile circles around Hanoi. 179

For the moment at least neither the hawks nor the doves had won their case. The President had decided merely to extend ROLLING THUNDER within the general outlines already established. In effect, the RT 57 was a decision to postpone the issue, insuring that the partisans would continue their fight. As for the President, he would not move decisively until the next year when outside events were heavily forcing his hand and a new Secretary of Defense had entered the debate.

V. THE LONG ROAD TO DE-ESCALATION -- AUGUST-DECEMBER 1967

After the decision on ROLLING THUNDER 57, the debate on the air war against North Vietnam, particularly the public debate, entered a last long phase of increasing acrimony on both sides. As he had been throughout the war, President Johnson was once again caught in the crossfire of his critics of the right and the left. The open-season on Presidential war policy began in August with the high intensity Senate Preparedness Subcommittee hearings where Senator Stennis and his colleagues fired the first shots. In September, the embattled President tried again for peace, capping his secret efforts with a new public offer to Hanoi in a speech in San Antonio. The attempt was unavailing and, under pressure from the military and the hawkish elements of public and Congressional opinion, the President authorized a selected intensification of the air war. The doves were not long in responding. In October they staged a massive demonstration and march on the Pentagon to oppose the war, there confronting specially alerted troops in battle gear. A month later, Senator McCarthy announced himself as a peace candidate for the Presidency to oppose Lyndon Johnson within his own party. By Christmas, however, the issue had subsided a bit. Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland had both returned home and spoken in public to defend the Administration's conduct of the war, and reports from the field showed a cautious optimism. The stage was thus set for the dramatic Viet Cong Tet offensive in January of the new year, an assault that would have a traumatic impact on official Washington and set in motion a re-evaluation of the whole American policy.

A. Senator Stennis Forces an Escalation

1. The Addendum to ROLLING THUNDER

Sometime after his return from Vietnam in late July, Secretary McNamara was informed by Senator Stennis that the Preparedness Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee intended to conduct extensive hearings in August into the conduct of the air war against North Vietnam. In addition to their intention to call the Secretary, they also indicated that they would hear from all the top military leaders involved in the ROLLING THUNDER program including: USCINCPAC, Admiral Sharp. The subcommittee had unquestionably set out to defeat Mr. McNamara. Its members, Senators Stennis, Symington, Jackson, Cannon, Byrd, Smith, Thurmond, and Miller, were known for their hard-line views and military sympathies. They were defenders of "airpower" and had often aligned themselves with the "professional military experts" against what they considered "unskilled civilian amateurs." They viewed the restraints on bombing as irrational, the shackling of a major instrument which could help win victory. With

Vietnam blown up into a major war, with more than half a million U.S. troops and a cost of more than \$2 billion a month, and with no clear end in sight, their patience with a restrained bombing program was beginning to wear thin. But more was involved than a disagreement over the conduct of the war. Some passionately held convictions had been belittled, and some members of the subcommittee were on the warpath. As the subcommittee subsequently wrote in the introduction to its report, explaining the reasons for the inquiry:

Earlier this year many statements appeared in the press which were calculated to belittle the effectiveness of the air campaign over North Vietnam. Many of these statements alleged, or at least implied, that all military targets of significance had been destroyed, that the air campaign had been conducted as effectively as possible, and that continuation of the air campaign was pointless and useless--possibly even prolonging the war itself. At the same time reports were being circulated that serious consideration was being given in high places to a cessation of the air campaign over North Vietnam, or a substantial curtailment of it. Many of these reports were attributed to unnamed high Government officials.

In view of the importance of the air campaign, on June 28, 1967, the subcommittee announced it would conduct an extensive inquiry into the conduct and effectiveness of the bombing campaign over North Vietnam. 1/

In July the President had decided against both an escalatory and a de-escalatory option in favor of continuing the prevailing level and intensity of bombing. However, the prospect of having his bombing policy submitted to the harsh scrutiny of the Stennis committee, taking testimony from such unhappy military men as Admiral Sharp, must have forced a recalculation on the President. It is surely no coincidence that on August 9, the very day the Stennis hearings opened, an addendum to ROLLING THUNDER 57 was issued authorizing an additional sixteen fixed targets and an expansion of armed reconnaissance. Significantly, six of the targets were within the sacred 10-mile Hanoi inner circle. They included the thermal power plant, 3 rail yards, and 2 bridges. Nine targets were located on the northeast rail line in the China buffer zone, the closest one 8 miles from the border, and consisted of 4 bridges and 5 rail yards/sidings; the tenth was a naval base, also within the China buffer zone. Armed reconnaissance was authorized along 8 road, rail, and waterway segments between the 10-mile and a 4-mile circle around Haiphong, and attacks were permitted against railroad rolling stock within the China buffer zone up to within 8 miles of the border. 2/ But the power of Congress was not to be denied. Where the military alone had tried unsuccessfully for so long to erode the Hanoi/Haiphong sanctuaries, the pressure implicit in the impending hearings, where military men would be asked to speak their minds to a

friendly audience, was enough to succeed -- at least for the moment.

Attacks against the newly authorized targets began promptly and continued through the two-week period of the Stennis hearings. On August 11 the Paul Doumer Rail and Highway Bridge, the principle river crossing in the direction of Haiphong located very near the center of Hanoi, was struck for the first time and two of its spans were dropped. Other important Hanoi targets were also struck on the 11th and 12th. The intensity of the strikes continued to mount, and on August 20, 209 sorties were launched, the highest number to date in the war. During that day and the succeeding two, heavy attacks continued against the Hanoi targets and within the China buffer zone. On the 21st in connection with these attacks a long feared danger of the northern air war became reality. Two U.S. planes strayed over the Chinese border and were shot down by Chinese MIGs. On August 19, at McNamara's direction, the JCS instructed CINCPAC to suspend operations within the ten-mile Hanoi perimeter from August 24 to September 4. 3/ The Stennis hearings were ending and a particularly delicate set of contacts with North Vietnam were under way in Paris (see below). The suspension was designed both to avoid provocation and to manifest restraint.

2. The Stennis Hearings

Meanwhile in Washington, the Stennis hearings opened on August 9 with Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp, USCINCPAC, as the first witness. In the following two weeks the subcommittee heard testimony from the entire senior echelon of U.S. military leaders involved in the air war, including the Joint Chiefs, CINCPAC, CINCPACFLT, CINCPACAF, and the commander and former deputy commander of the 7th Air Force in Saigon. The final witness on August 25 was Secretary McNamara who found himself pitted against the military men who had preceded him by the hostile members of the subcommittee as he sought to deflate the claims for U.S. air power. The hearings, released by the subcommittee only days after the testimony was completed, and given extensive treatment by the media, exposed to public view the serious divergence of views between McNamara and the country's professional military leaders. The subcommittee's summary report, which sided with the military and sharply criticized McNamara's reasoning, forced the Administration into an awkward position. 4/ Ultimately, the President felt compelled to overrule McNamara's logic in his own version of the matter. Once again the President was caught unhappily in the middle satisfying neither his critics of the right nor the left.

The subcommittee heard first from the military leaders involved in the air war. It was told that the air war in the North was an important and indispensable part of the U.S. strategy for fighting the war in the South. It was told that the bombing had inflicted extensive destruction and disruption on NVN, holding down the infiltration of men and supplies, restricting the level of forces that could be sustained in the South and reducing the ability of those forces to mount major

sustained combat operations, thus resulting in fewer U.S. casualties. It was told that without the bombing, NVN could have doubled its forces in the South, requiring as many as 800,000 additional U.S. troops at a cost of \$75 billion more just to hold our own. It was told that without the bombing NVN could have freed 500,000 people who were at work maintaining and repairing the LOCs in the North for additional support of the insurgency in the South. It was told that a cessation of the bombing now would be "a disaster," resulting in increased U.S. losses and an indefinite extension of the war.

The subcommittee was also told that the bombing had been much less effective than it might have been -- and could still be -- if civilian leaders heeded military advice and lifted the overly restrictive controls which had been imposed on the campaign. The slow tempo of the bombing; its concentration for so long well south of the vital Hanoi/Haiphong areas, leaving the important targets untouched; the existence of sanctuaries; the failure to close or neutralize the port of Haiphong--these and other limitations prevented the bombing from achieving greater results. The "doctrine of gradualism" and the long delays in approving targets of real significance, moreover, gave NVN time to build up formidable air defenses, contributing to U.S. aircraft and pilot losses, and enabled NVN to prepare for the anticipated destruction of its facilities (such as POL) by building up reserve stocks and dispersing them.

When Secretary McNamara appeared before the subcommittee on August 25, he took issue with most of these views. He defended the bombing campaign as one which was carefully tailored to our limited purposes in Southeast Asia and which was therefore aimed at selected targets of strictly military significance, primarily the routes of infiltration. As he restated the objectives which the bombing was intended to serve:

Our primary objective was to reduce the flow and/or to increase the cost of the continued infiltration of men and supplies from North to South Vietnam.

It was also anticipated that these air operations would raise the morale of the South Vietnamese people who, at the time the bombing started, were under severe military pressure.

Finally, we hoped to make clear to the North Vietnamese leadership that so long as they continued their aggression against the South they would have to pay a price in the North.

The bombing of North Vietnam has always been considered a supplement to and not a substitute for an effective counter-insurgency land and air campaign in South Vietnam.

These were our objectives when our bombing program was initiated in February 1965. They remain our objectives today. 5/

Weighed against these objectives, the bombing campaign had been successful:

It was initiated at a time when the South Vietnamese were in fear of a military defeat. There can be no question that the bombing raised and sustained the morale of the South Vietnamese at that time. It should be equally clear to the North Vietnamese that they have paid and will continue to pay a high price for their continued aggression. We have also made the infiltration of men and supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam increasingly difficult and costly. 6/

With respect to infiltration, the Secretary said, military leaders had never anticipated that complete interdiction was possible. He cited the nature of combat in SVN, without "established battle lines" and continuous large-scale fighting, which did not require a steady stream of logistical support and which reduced the amount needed. Intelligence estimated that VC/NVA forces in SVN required only 15 tons a day brought in from outside, "but even if the quantity were five times that amount it could be transported by only a few trucks." By comparison with that amount, the capacity of the transportation network was very large:

North Vietnam's ability to continue its aggression against the South thus depends upon imports of war-supporting material and their transshipment to the South. Unfortunately for the chances of effective interdiction, this simple agricultural economy has a highly diversified transportation system consisting of rails and roads and waterways. The North Vietnamese use barges and sampans, trucks and foot power, and even bicycles capable of carrying 500-pound loads to move goods over this network. The capacity of this system is very large -- the volume of traffic it is now required to carry, in relation to its capacity, is very small....Under these highly unfavorable circumstances, I think that our military forces have done a superb job in making continued infiltration more difficult and expensive. 7/

The Secretary defended the targeting decisions which had been made in carrying out the program, and the "target-by-target analysis" which balanced the military importance of the target against the cost in U.S. lives and the risks of expanding the war. He argued that the target selection had not inhibited the use of airpower against targets of military significance. The target list in current use by the JCS

contained 427 targets, of which only 359 had been recommended by the Chiefs. Of the latter, strikes had been authorized against 302, or 85 percent. Of the 57 recommended by the JCS but not yet authorized, 7 were recognized by the JCS themselves as of little value to NVN's war effort, 9 were petroleum facilities holding less than 6 percent of NVN's remaining storage capacity, 25 were lesser targets in populated, heavily defended areas, 4 were more significant targets in such areas, 3 were ports, 4 were airfields, and 5 were in the China buffer zone. Some of these targets did not warrant the loss of American lives; others did not justify the risk of direct confrontation with the Chinese or the Soviets; still others would be considered for authorization as they were found to be of military importance as compared with the potential costs and risks. 8/

The Secretary argued that those who criticized the limited nature of the bombing campaign actually sought to reorient it toward different -- and unrealizable objectives:

Those who criticize our present bombing policy do so, in my opinion, because they believe that air attack against the North can be utilized to achieve quite different objectives. These critics appear to argue that our airpower can win the war in the South either by breaking the will of the North or by cutting off the war-supporting supplies needed in the south. In essence, this approach would seek to use the air attack against the North not as a supplement to, but as a substitute for the arduous ground war that we and our allies are waging in the South. 9/

First, as to breaking the will of the North, neither the nature of NVN's economy nor the psychology of its people or its leaders suggested that this could be accomplished by a more intensive bombing campaign. For one thing, it was difficult to apply pressure against the regime through bombing the economy:

...the economy of North Vietnam is agrarian and simple. Its people are accustomed to few of the modern comforts and conveniences that most of us in the Western World take for granted. They are not dependent on the continued functioning of great cities for their welfare. They can be fed at something approaching the standard to which they are accustomed without reliance on truck or rail transportation or on food processing facilities. Our air attack has rendered inoperative about 85 percent of the country's electric generating capacity, but it is important to note that the Pepco plant in Alexandria, Va., generates five times the power produced by all of

North Vietnam's power plants before the bombing. It appears that sufficient electricity for war-related activities and for essential services can be provided by the some 2,000 diesel-driven generating sets which are in operation. 10/

Second, the people were inured to hardship and by all the evidence supported the government:

...the people of North Vietnam are accustomed to discipline and are no strangers to deprivation and death. Available information indicates that, despite some war weariness, they remain willing to endure hardship and they continue to respond to the political direction of the Hanoi regime. There is little reason to believe that any level of conventional air or naval action short of sustained and systematic bombing of the population centers will deprive the North Vietnamese of their willingness to continue to support their government's efforts. 11/

Third, NVN's leaders were hard to crack, at least so long as their cause in the South was hopeful:

There is nothing in the past reaction of the North Vietnamese leaders that would provide any confidence that they can be bombed to the negotiating table. Their regard for the comfort and even the lives of the people they control does not seem to be sufficiently high to lead them to bargain for settlement in order to stop a heightened level of attack.

The course of the conflict on the ground in the south, rather than the scale of air attack in the north appears to be the determining factor in North Vietnam's willingness to continue. 12/

The second alternative aim might be to stop the flow of supplies to the South, either through an expanded campaign against the supply routes within NVN or by closing sea and land importation routes to NVN, or both. But it was doubtful whether heavier bombing of the LOCs could choke off the required flow:

...the capacity of the lines of communication and of the outside sources of supply so far exceeds the minimal flow necessary to support the present level of North

Vietnamese military effort in South Vietnam that the enemy operations in the south cannot, on the basis of any reports I have seen, be stopped by air bombardment-- short, that is, of the virtual annihilation of North Vietnam and its people. 13/

Nor could bombing the ports and mining the harbors stop the infiltration of supplies into SVN. The total tonnage required in SVN (15 tons a day) could be quintupled and would still be dwarfed by NVN's actual imports of about 5800 tons a day and its even greater import capacity of about 14,000 tons a day. Even if Haiphong and the other ports were closed -- "and on the unrealistic assumption that closing the ports would eliminate seaborne imports" -- NVN could still import over 8400 tons a day by rail, road, and waterway. Even if the latter amount could be further cut by 50 percent through air attacks, NVN could still maintain 70 percent of its current imports, only a fraction of which -- 550 tons per day -- need be taken up with military equipment. In fact, however, eliminating Haiphong and the other ports would not eliminate seaborne imports. The POL experience had shown that NVN could revert to lightering and over-the-beach operations for unloading ocean freighters, and it could also make greater use of the LOCs from China, and still manage quite well.

Accordingly, the Secretary urged that the limited objectives and the restrained nature of the bombing campaign be maintained as is:

A selective, carefully targeted bombing campaign, such as we are presently conducting, can be directed toward reasonable and realizable goals. This discriminating use of air power can and does render the infiltration of men and supplies more difficult and more costly. At the same time, it demonstrates to both South and North Vietnam our resolve to see that aggression does not succeed. A less discriminating bombing campaign against North Vietnam would, in my opinion, do no more. We have no reason to believe that it would break the will of the North Vietnamese people or sway the purpose of their leaders. If it does not lead to such a change of mind, bombing the North at any level of intensity would not meet our objective. We would still have to prove by ground operations in the South that Hanoi's aggression could not succeed. Nor would a decision to close /the ports/, by whatever means, prevent the movement in and through North Vietnam of the essentials to continue their present level of military activity in South Vietnam.

On the other side of the equation, our report to a less selective campaign of air attack against the North would

involve risks which at present I regard as too high to accept for this dubious prospect of successful results. 14/

The Secretary spent the day on the witness stand, answering questions, rebutting charges, and debating the issues. His use of facts and figures and reasoned arguments was one of his masterful performances, but in the end he was not persuasive. The subcommittee issued a report on 31 August which castigated the Administration's conduct of the bombing campaign, deferred to the authority of the professional military judgments it had heard, accepted virtually all the military criticisms of the program, and advocated a switch-over to escalating "pressure" concepts.

The Secretary had emphasized the inability of the bombing to accomplish much more, given the nature of U.S. objectives and of the difficult challenge presented by the overall military situation. The subcommittee disagreed:

That the air campaign has not achieved its objectives to a greater extent cannot be attributed to inability or impotence of airpower. It attests, rather, to the fragmentation of our air might by overly restrictive controls, limitations, and the doctrine of 'gradualism' placed on our aviation forces which prevented them from waging the air campaign in the manner and according to the timetable which was best calculated to achieve maximum results. 15/

The Secretary had said there was no evidence of any kind to indicate that an accelerated campaign would have reduced casualties in the South; the subcommittee reported that the overwhelming weight of the testimony by military experts was to the contrary. The Secretary had minimized the importance of the 57 recommended targets which had not yet been approved, and implied that few if any important military targets remained unstruck; CINCPAC and the Chiefs said the 57 included many "lucrative" targets. The Secretary had discounted the value of closing Haiphong; all of the military witnesses said that this was feasible and necessary and would have a substantial impact on the war in the South. In all of these matters the subcommittee did not believe that the Secretary's position was valid and felt that the military view was sounder and should prevail:

In our hearings we found a sharp difference of opinion between the civilian authority and the top-level military witnesses who appeared before the subcommittee over how and when our airpower should be employed against North Vietnam. In that difference we believe we also found the roots of the persistent deterioration of public confidence in our airpower, because the plain facts as they unfolded in the testimony demonstrated clearly that civilian authority consistently overruled the unanimous recommendations of

of military commanders and the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a systematic, timely, and hard-hitting integrated air campaign against the vital North Vietnam targets. Instead, and for policy reasons, we have employed military aviation in a carefully controlled, restricted, and graduated buildup of bombing pressure which discounted the professional judgment of our best military experts and substituted civilian judgment in the details of target selection and the timing of strikes. We shackled the true potential of airpower and permitted the buildup of what has become the world's most formidable antiaircraft defenses....

It is not our intention to point a finger or to second guess those who determined this policy. But, the cold fact is that this policy has not done the job and it has been contrary to the best military judgment. What is needed now is the hard decision to do whatever is necessary, take the risks that have to be taken, and apply the force that is required to see the job through....

As between these diametrically opposed views [of the SecDef and the military experts] and in view of the unsatisfactory progress of the war, logic and prudence requires that the decision be with the unanimous weight of professional military judgment....

It is high time, we believe, to allow the military voice to be heard in connection with the tactical details of military operations. 16/

3. The Fallout

This bombing controversy simmered on for the next few months and when a major secret peace attempt associated with the San Antonio formula failed, the President authorized most of the 57 unstruck targets the JCS had recommended and which the Stennis report had criticized the Administration for failing to hit. In addition, the Chairman of the JCS was thereafter asked to attend the Tuesday policy luncheon at the White House as a regular participant.

The Stennis hearings also created considerable confusion and controversy within the Pentagon over the target classification and recommendation system. The Senators had been at pains to try to establish whether targets recommended by the military were being authorized and struck or conversely to what extent the military was being ignored.

In trying to respond to the question McNamara discovered a great deal of fluidity in the number of targets on JCS lists over time, and in the priority or status assigned to them. He therefore set out to reconcile the discrepancies. The effort unearthed a highly complex system of classification that began with the military commands in the Pacific and extended through the Joint Staff to his own office. Part of the problem lay with the changing damage assessments and another part with differing categories at different echelons. To untangle the process, reconcile past discrepancies and establish a common basis for classification and recommendation, McNamara, Warnke, the ISA staff and the Joint Staff spent long hours in September and October in highly detailed target by target analysis and evaluation. After much wrangling they did achieve agreement on a procedure and set of rules that made it possible for everyone to work with the same data and understanding of the target system. The procedure they set up and the one that operated through the fall and winter until the March 31 partial suspension was described in a memo from Warnke to incoming Secretary Clark Clifford on March 5, 1968:

Twice a month the Joint Staff has been revising the Rolling Thunder Target List for the bombing of North Vietnam. The revisions are forwarded to my office and reconciled with the prior list. This reconciliation summary is then forwarded to your office....

Every Tuesday and Friday the Joint Staff has been sending me a current list of the authorized targets on the target list which have not been struck or restruct since returning to a recommended status. After our review, this list also is sent to your office....

In the normal course of events, new recommendations by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for targets lying within the 10 and 4 mile prohibited circles around Hanoi and Haiphong, respectively, or in the Chinese Buffer Zone have been submitted both to the Secretary of Defense's office and to my office in ISA. ISA would then ensure that the State Department had sufficient information to make its recommendation on the new proposal. ISA also submitted its evaluation of the proposal to your office. On occasions the Chairman would hand-carry the new bombing proposals directly to the Secretary of Defense for his approval. Under those circumstances, the Secretary, if he were not thoroughly familiar with the substance of the proposal, would call ISA for an evaluation. State Department and White House approval also were required before the Chairman's office could authorize the new strikes. 17/

also raised a furor by exposing
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unscheduled news conference on
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found himself so far out of line
ion policy.

SB check

1. Peace Feelers

In the midst of all this pressure on the President to raise the ante in the bombing, a countervailing opportunity for contact with the DRV on terms for peace developed in Paris. In mid-August a channel to the North Vietnamese through U.S. and French academics apparently opened up in Paris. Eager as always to test whether Hanoi had softened its position, the U.S. picked up the opportunity. As already noted, on 19 August a cessation of the attacks in the 10-mile Hanoi perimeter was ordered for a ten day period beginning on August 24. Sometime thereafter, what was regarded as a conciliatory proposal, embodying the language of the subsequent San Antonio speech, was apparently transmitted to the North Vietnamese. The unfortunate coincidence of heavy bombing attacks on Hanoi on August 21-23, just prior to the transmission of the message, coupled with the fact that the Hanoi suspension was to be of limited duration must have left the DRV leadership with the strong impression they were being squeezed by Johnsonian pressure tactics and presented with an ultimatum. Apparently, no reply from Hanoi had arrived by the 1st of September because the Hanoi suspension was extended for 72-hours, and then on 7 September the suspension was impatiently extended again pending a reply from North Vietnam. When the reply finally came, it was an emphatic rejection of the U.S. proposal. The U.S. sought to clarify its position and elicit some positive reaction from the Hanoi leadership but to no avail. The contacts in Paris apparently continued throughout September since the bombing restraint around Hanoi was not relaxed, but Hanoi maintained its charge that the circumstances in which the message was communicated placed it in the context of an ultimatum. 18/

2. The President's Speech and Hanoi's Reaction

With Hanoi complaining that the raids deflected from Hanoi were merely being retargeted against Haiphong, Cam Pha and other parts of the North and that the U.S. was escalating not de-escalating the air war, the President decided to make a dramatic public attempt to overcome

the communications barrier between the two capitals. In San Antonio, on September 29, the President delivered a long impassioned plea for reason in Hanoi. The central function of the speech was to repeat publicly the language of the negotiations proposal that had been transmitted in August. The President led up to it in melodramatic fashion:

"Why not negotiate now?' so many ask me. The answer is that we and our South Vietnamese allies are wholly prepared to negotiate tonight.

"I am ready to talk with Ho Chi Minh, and other chiefs of state concerned, tomorrow.

"I am ready to have Secretary Rusk meet with their Foreign Minister tomorrow.

"I am ready to send a trusted representative of America to any spot on this earth to talk in public or private with a spokesman of Hanoi." 19/

Then he stated the U.S. terms for a bombing halt in their mildest form to date:

As we have told Hanoi time and time and time again, the heart of the matter is this: The United States is willing to stop all aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam when this will lead promptly to productive discussions. We, of course, assume that while discussions proceed, North Vietnam would not take advantage of this bombing cessation or limitation. 20/

After the speech, the contacts in Paris presumably continued in an effort to illicit a positive response from Hanoi, but, in spite of the continued restraint around Hanoi, none was apparently forthcoming. The North Vietnamese objections to the proposal had shifted it seems from the circumstances of its delivery to the substance of the proposal itself. Instead of their earlier complaints about pressures and ultimatums, they now resisted the "conditions" of the San Antonio formula -- i.e. the U.S. desire for advance assurance that "no advantage" would be taken if the bombing were halted. Continued U.S. probing for a response apparently reinforced the impression of "conditions." In any case, on October 3, the San Antonio formulation was emphatically rejected in the North Vietnamese party newspaper, Nham Dan, as a "faked desire for peace" and "sheer deception." This was apparently confirmed through the Paris channel in mid-October. In his press conference on October 12, Secretary Rusk as much as said so when, after quoting the President's offer, he stated:

A rejection, or a refusal even to discuss such a formula for peace, requires that we face some sober conclusions. It would mean that Hanoi has not abandoned its effort to seize South Vietnam by force. It would give reality and credibility to captured documents which describe a 'fight and negotiate' strategy by Vietcong and the North Vietnamese forces. It would reflect a view in Hanoi that they can gamble upon the character of the American people and of our allies in the Pacific. 22/

Final confirmation that the attempt to find a common ground on which to begin negotiations had failed came in an article by the Communist journalist Wilfred Burchette on October 20. Reporting from Hanoi the views of Pham Van Dong, Burchette stated that, "There is no possibility of any talks or even contacts between Hanoi and the U.S. government unless the bombardment and other acts of war against North Vietnam are definitively halted." 23/ But the American Administration had already taken a series of escalatory decisions under pressure from the military and the Stennis committee.

3. More Targets

The September-long restriction against striking targets within the ten mile Hanoi perimeter was imposed on the military command with no explanation of its purpose since apparently every effort was being made to maintain the security of the contacts in Paris. Thus, not surprisingly, CINCPAC complained about the limitation and regularly sought to have it lifted throughout the month. On September 11, General McConnell forwarded a request to the Secretary for a restrike of the Hanoi thermal power plant. 24/ On September 21, CINCPAC again reiterated his urgent request that the Hanoi ban be lifted. 25/ The day before he had also requested authority to strike the Phuc Yen air field. 26/ In sending his endorsement of these requests to McNamara, the acting Chairman, General Johnson, noted that there were fifteen lucrative targets within the prohibited Hanoi area including critical rail and highway bridges and the Hanoi power plant, the latter reportedly back to 50% of capability. 27/ McNamara replied tersely and simply, in his own hand, "The Hanoi restriction remains in effect so this strike has not been approved." 28/ The requested authorization to hit Phuc Yen air field was not a strike within the Hanoi ten mile zone but was militarily important because Phuc Yen was the largest remaining unstruck MIG field and a center of much of North Vietnam's air defense control. On September 26, it was approved for strike, but before one could be launched the authorization was rescinded on September 29, no doubt because of concern about upsetting the delicate Paris contacts. 29/

To these continuing pressures on the President from the JCS to remove the Hanoi restrictions were added at the end of September an

additional request from General Westmoreland bearing on the effort against North Vietnam. The enemy buildup in the DMZ area had become serious and to counter it an increasing number of B-52 strikes were being employed. Eventually this confrontation at the DMZ would involve the heavy artillery exchanges of the fall of 1967 and culminate in the protracted siege of Khe Sanh. For the moment, however, Westmoreland was seeking as a part of his DMZ reinforcement an augmentation in the monthly B-52 sortie authorization. His request was outlined by the Chiefs in a memo to Mr. Mitze on September 28. They indicated a capability to raise the sorties to 900 per month immediately and were studying the problem of raising them to 1200 as requested by Westy. The use of 2,000 lb. bombs was feasible and the Chiefs recommended it depending on their availability. 30/ McNamara gave his OK to the increase in a memo to the President on October 4, but indicated that the increase to 1200 per month could not be achieved before January or February 1968. 31/

Undaunted by repeated rebuffs, the Chiefs, under the temporary leadership of Army Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson (General Wheeler had been stricken by a mild heart attack in early September and was away from his desk for a little over a month), continued to press for lifting the Hanoi restrictions and for permission to attack Phuc Yen. On October 4 they gave McNamara a package of papers on the current target list complete with draft execute messages lifting the Hanoi ban and authorizing Phuc Yen, both of which they recommended. 32/ Two days later a specific request to hit the Hanoi power plant was forwarded, noting the DIA estimate that the power plant was back to 75% of its original capacity. 33/ On October 7, CINCPAC sent the JCS a monthly summary of the ROLLING THUNDER program in September and used the opportunity once again to complain about the detrimental effects of maintaining the Hanoi restriction. Adverse weather because of the northeast Monsoon had severely curtailed the number of sorties flown to 8,540 compared with 11,634 in August. This had permitted a considerable amount of damage-recovery in North Vietnam. The maintenance of the Hanoi sanctuary only compounded the problem for the U.S. "This combination of circumstances provides the enemy the opportunity to repair rail lines, reconstruct downed bridges, and accommodate to much of the initial efforts to maintain pressure against the vital LOC network." 34/ In Admiral Sharp's view, countering these recovery efforts was of the first priority.

The following day he sent the Chiefs another message specifically requesting that the rescinded approval for strikes against Phuc Yen airfield be reinstated. Increased MIG activity against our jets over North Vietnam was cited as requiring the destruction of this last remaining major airfield. The crux of his argument, however, was the necessity of such a strike to the maintenance of pilot morale -- a rationale entirely exempt from statistical analysis in OSD. He stated the case as follows:

The morale of our air crews understandably rose when briefed to strike Phuc Yen airfield and its MIG's -- A target which has continually jeopardized their well-being. The unexplained revocation of that authority coupled with the increasing numbers and aggressiveness of MIG-21 attacks cannot help but impact adversely on air crew morale. Air crews flying combat missions through the intense NVN defenses, air to air and ground to air, have demonstrated repeatedly their courage and determination to press home their attack against vital targets. Every effort should be made to reduce the hazard to them, particularly from a threat in which the enemy is afforded a sanctuary and can attack at his own choosing. 35/

With the failure of the peace initiative in Paris, these escalatory pressures could no longer be resisted. As it became evident that peace talks were not in the offing, the President approved six new targets on October 6 (including 5 in or near Haiphong). Secretary Rusk in his October 12 news conference strongly questioned the seriousness of North Vietnamese intent for peace and finally on October 20 the Paris contacts were closed in failure. The Tuesday lunch on October 24 would thus have to make important new bombing decisions. The day before, Warnke outlined current JCS recommendations for Secretary McNamara, including Phuc Yen. 36/ The White House meeting the following day duly approved Phuc Yen along with a restrike of the Hanoi power transformer and the temporary lifting of the Hanoi restrictions. 37/ On October 25, the MIGs at Phuc Yen were attacked for the first time and Hanoi was struck again after the long suspension.

The Tuesday luncheon at which the Phuc Yen decision was made was a regular decision-making forum for the air war and one that came to public attention as a result of the Stennis hearings. Indicative of the public interest in these gatherings is the following impressionistic account by CBS newsman Dan Rather of how they were conducted:

First Line Report, 6:55 a.m.
WTOP Radio, October 17, 1967

Dan Rather: This is Target Tuesday. Today President Johnson decides whether North Vietnam will continue to be bombed. If it is, how much and where. These decisions are made at which Washington insiders call, for short, the Tuesday lunch. This is the way it goes.

At about 1:00 in the afternoon Defense Secretary McNamara, Secretary of State Rusk, and Presidential Assistant Walter Rostow gather in the White House second floor sitting room. They compare notes briefly over Scotch or Fresca. President

Johnson walks in with Press Secretary George Christian. McNamara, Rusk, Rostow, Christian, and the President--they are the Tuesday lunch regulars. The principal cast for Target Tuesday.

Sometimes others join. Chairman of the Military Joint Chiefs, General Earle Wheeler, for example. He's been coming more often recently, ever since the Senate Subcommittee on Preparedness Committee griped about no military man being present many times when final bombing decisions were made. Central Intelligence Director Richard Helms seldom comes. Vice President Humphrey almost never.

Decision making at the top is an intimate affair. Mr. Johnson prefers it that way. He knows men talk more freely in a small group.

After a bit of chatter over drinks in the sitting room, the President signals the move to the dining room. It is semi-oval, with a huge chandelier, a mural around the wall--brightly colored scenes of Cornwallis surrendering his sword at Yorktown. The President sits at the head, of course. Sits in a high back stiletto swivel chair. Rusk is at his right, McNamara on his left, Rostow is at the other end. Christian and the extras, if any, in between. Lunch begins, so does the serious conversation. There is an occasional pause, punctuated by the whirl of Mr. Johnson's battery-powered pepper grinder. He likes pepper and he likes the gadget.

Around the table the President's attention goes, sampling recommendations, arguments, thoughts. It is now the time for a bombing pause. How about just a bombing reduction? Laos, Haiphong, Hanoi, everything around population centers, confined bombing to that tiny part of North Vietnam bordering the Demilitarized Zone. McNamara long has favored this. He thinks it worth a try. Rusk has been going for some indication--the slightest hint will do--that a bombing pause or reduction will lead to meaningful negotiations. Rostow, least known of the Tuesday lunch regulars, also is a hard-liner. He more than Rusk is a pour-it-on man. Christian doesn't say much. He is there to give an opinion when asked about press and public reaction. The military representative, when there is one, usually speaks more than Christian, but less than McNamara, Rusk, and Rostow.

McNamara is the man with the target list. He gives his recommendations. If bomb we must, these are the targets he suggests. His recommendations are based on, but by no means completely agree with those of the military Joint Chiefs.

Their recommendations, in turn, are based on those of field commanders. Field commanders are under instructions not to recommend certain targets in certain areas--Haiphong docks, the air defense command center in Hanoi, and so forth. There is much controversy and some bitterness about these off-limit targets. There have been fewer and fewer of them since July. Some new ones went off the list just last week.

The luncheon meeting continues over coffee until 3:00, 3:30, sometimes even 4:00. When it is over, the President goes for a nap. The bombing decisions have been made for another week.

In thinking about Target Tuesday and the White House luncheon where so many decisions are on the menu, you may want to consider the words of 19th Century writer F. W. Borum: "We make our decisions, and then our decisions turn around and make us."

Even before the Phuc Yen decision was taken, the Chiefs had sent McNamara for transmittal to the President a major memo outlining their overall recommendations for the air war as requested by the President on September 12. The President had asked to see a set of proposals for putting more pressure on Hanoi. On October 17 that was exactly what he got and the list was not short. The Chiefs outlined their understanding of the objectives of the war, the constraints within which the national authorities wished it to be fought, the artificial limitations that were impeding the achievement of our objectives and a recommended list of ten new measures against North Vietnam. Since the memo stands as one of the last major military arguments for the long-sought wider war against North Vietnam before the trauma of Tet 1968 and the subsequent U.S. de-escalation, and because of its crisp, terse articulation of the JCS point of view, it is included here in its entirety.



18 OCT 67 07 12

OFFICE OF THE
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

JCSM-555-67

17 October 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: Increased Pressures on North Vietnam (U)

1. (U) Reference is made to:

a. NSAM 288, dated 17 March 1964, subject: "Implementation of South Vietnam Program (U)."

b. JCSM-982-64, dated 23 November 1964, subject: "Courses of Action in Southeast Asia (U)."

c. JCSM-811-65, dated 10 November 1965, subject: "Future Operations and Force Deployments with Respect to the War in Vietnam (U)."

2. (U) The purpose of this memorandum is to identify those military actions consistent with present policy guidelines which would serve to increase pressures on North Vietnam (NVN), thereby accelerating the rate of progress toward achievement of the US objective in South Vietnam.

3. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that NVN is paying heavily for its aggression and has lost the initiative in the South. They further consider that many factors--though not uniform nor necessarily controlling--indicate a military trend favorable to Free World Forces in Vietnam. South Vietnam, in the face of great difficulty, is making slow progress on all fronts--military, political, and economic. However, pace of progress indicates that, if acceleration is to be achieved, an appropriate increase in military pressure is required.

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of 2 plus series "A"

4. (S) Military operations in Southeast Asia have been conducted within a framework of policy guidelines established to achieve US objectives without expanding the conflict. Principal among these policy guidelines are:

a. We seek to avoid widening the war into a conflict with Communist China or the USSR.

b. We have no present intention of invading NVN.

c. We do not seek the overthrow of the Government of NVN.

d. We are guided by the principles set forth in the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962.

5. (TS) Although some progress is being made within this framework, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that the rate of progress has been and continues to be slow, largely because US military power has been restrained in a manner which has reduced significantly its impact and effectiveness. Limitations have been imposed on military operations in four ways:

a. The attacks on the enemy military targets have been on such a prolonged, graduated basis that the enemy has adjusted psychologically, economically, and militarily; e.g., inured themselves to the difficulties and hardships accompanying the war, dispersed their logistic support system, and developed alternate transport routes and a significant air defense system.

b. Areas of sanctuary, containing important military targets, have been afforded the enemy.

c. Covert operations in Cambodia and Laos have been restricted.

d. Major importation of supplies into NVN by sea has been permitted.

6. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that US objectives in Southeast Asia can be achieved within the policy framework set forth in paragraph 4, above, providing the level of assistance the enemy receives from his communist allies is not significantly increased and there is no diminution of US efforts. However, progress will continue to be slow so long as present limitations on military operations continue in effect. Further, at our present pace, termination of NVN's military effort is not expected

to occur in the near future. Set forth in the Appendix are those actions which can be taken in the near future within the present framework of policy guidelines to increase pressures on NVN and accelerate progress toward the achievement of US objectives. They require a relaxation or removal of certain limitations on operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognize that expansion of US efforts entails some additional risk. They believe that as a result of this expansion the likelihood of overt introduction of Soviet Bloc/CPR combat forces into the war would be remote. Failure to take additional action to shorten the Southeast Asia conflict also entails risks as new and more efficient weapons are provided to NVN by the Soviet Union and as USSR/CPR support of the enemy increases.

7. (U) The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that they be authorized to direct the actions in the Appendix.

8. (S) This memorandum is intended to respond to the questions raised by the President at the White House luncheon on 12 September 1967; therefore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff request that this memorandum be submitted to the President.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:



EARLE G. WHEELER
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

Attachment

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS VISIBLE PRESENT GUIDANCE WHICH COULD BE TAKEN IN 1975, PRIOR TO THE 1975

ACTIONS	SPECIFIC ACTIONS	ADVANTAGE	RISKS/IMPACT
1. Remove restrictions on air campaign against all militarily significant targets in NVN (ROLLING THUNDER).	Eliminate Haiphong and Hanoi prohibited areas. Reduce Hanoi and Haiphong restricted areas to the city proper. Reduce CTR Buffer Zone to 10 miles. Conduct unrestricted attacks against LOC, rail lines, roads up to five miles from CTR border. Authorize CMC/PCF strike and restrike prerogative for all targets outside of redefined restricted areas. Permit JCS to authorize strikes against targets in the redefined restricted areas on a case-by-case basis (to include Haiphong port).	Greater destruction of NVN war-supporting facilities. Increased destruction of air defenses including airfields. Reduce logistic support of NVN/VC. More efficient use of available forces. Favorable impact on reducing friendly casualties, particularly in critical I Corps/NVA area. Permits timely reaction against targets of opportunity.	Chances of escalation. Increased use of CTR airfields for storage or training, but not for combat missions. Increased CTR AAA and Engineer support in NVN.
2. Mine NVN deep water ports.	Establish, replenish as required, mine fields in approaches and harbors at Haiphong, Hon Gai and Cao Pha. Publish warning notice to mariners. Adjust/extend mine fields as necessary to prevent bypassing.	Reduce import of war-supporting materials.	Soviet Union may cancel existing negotiations with the US and initiate propaganda campaign. Possible Soviet actions to increase tensions in other parts of the world but major confrontations would be unlikely. CTR would strengthen defensive posture and may increase military aid to NVN; unlikely to initiate offensive air or surface actions.
3. Mine inland waterways and estuaries in NVN north of 20° N.	Mine mouths of navigable NVN rivers. Mine navigable inland waterways throughout NVN to within 5 NM of CTR border (authority currently limited to those south of 20° N).	Interdict inland waterway LOCs. Deny waterborne logistic aid and block channels. Require great NVN sweeping effort. Reduce POL and other cargo distribution.	No specific military reaction from communists. Some increased propaganda against US action.
4. Extend naval surface operations (SEA DRAGON).	Conduct offensive naval surface force operations against NVN military/logistic waterfront and against suitable targets in NVN across north of CTR N latitude to the redefined buffer zone (SEA DRAGON operations now limited to south of 20° N).	Interdict oceanic water traffic. Reduce use of land and LOCs by harassing gunfire.	Possible naval and air reaction by NVN in northern waters. CTR or Soviets might provide additional patrol craft.
5. Use US SAM (TALOS) from ships against combat aircraft.	Use sea-based SAM missiles against NVN aircraft both over water and in airspace over NVN.	Increase destruction of enemy air forces. Inhibit enemy air operations.	NVN air and surface attack possible. USSR or CTR might provide NVN with coast defense missiles.
6. Increase air interdiction in Laos and along NVN borders.	Selective bombing of Laotian waterway traffic (SEKONG). Establish special saturation bombing interdiction air-strike zones in Laos, e.g., northwest of NME, Nape and Mi Gia Passes.	Increased interdiction of LOCs and reduction of supplies to NVA/VC.	No immediate reaction other than propaganda. No Laos reaction.
7. Eliminate operational restrictions on B-52s with regard to Laos.	Overflight of Laos, by day and night, by B-52s en route to or from targets in Vietnam or Laos. Daylight bombing attacks on Laos. Eliminate requirement for cover strikes in SVN when bombing targets in Laos.	Greater operational efficiency and quicker reaction time for B-52s.	Possible political reactions.
8. Expand operations in Laos (PRAIRIE FIRE).	Increase authorized size of exploitation force.	Disrupt sanctuaries. Increased efficiency of interdiction. Reduce supplies to NVA/VC.	Possible increased NVA forces and activities in Laos.
9. Expand operations in Cambodia.	Expand current DANIEL BROWN reconnaissance program by extending the area of operations for the full length of the SVN/Cambodia border; authorize use of helicopters; remove limitations on number of missions. Authorize DANIEL BROWN forces to conduct limited sabotage/destruction activity; authorize calling in tactical airstrike on enemy targets near the border.	Disrupt sanctuaries. Reduce supplies to NVA/VC. Increase intelligence. Increase use of Cambodia as sanctuary for NVA/VC forces. Provide self-defense of US forces.	Cambodia would protest expansion of operations to Cambodian soil and might seek to defend its territory. Adverse political reaction.
10. Expand and intensify NVN covert programs (ROCKETS).	Undertake actions to increase the credibility of a current national resistance movement in NVN. Increase intelligence collection and covert physical destruction missions.	WN within country. WN covert programs as internal security.	WN would accuse the United States of attempting to bring about downfall of Government of NVN.

Ten days after this joint memo from the Chiefs, General Wheeler sent the Secretary a proposal of his own for the expansion of the air war under a new ROLLING THUNDER program, number 58. 38/ Its most important proposal was the reduction of Hanoi-Haiphong restricted circles down to 3 and 1.5 n.m. respectively. With other specific targets requested for authorization (of which the most important was Gia Lam airfield), this new proposal would have opened up an additional 15 valid targets for attack on the authority of the field commander. On the basis of an ISA recommendation, the reduction of the restricted zones around the two cities was rejected on November 9, but some of the additional individual targets were added to the authorized list. Consistent with these little escalatory measures was McNamara's decision on November 6 to authorize the deployment to Southeast Asia of a squadron of the first six F-111A aircraft to enter the Air Force active inventory. 40/ Like so many other decisions with respect to this ill-fated aircraft, this one would come to an unhappy end too. One of the specific objectives of the Chairman's proposal for constricting the prohibited areas had been to attempt the isolation of Haiphong on the ground, thereby effectively cutting off seaborne imports from their destinations in the rest of North Vietnam and to the war in the South. An independent CIA analysis of the air war at about this same time, however, had stated:

Even a more intense interdiction campaign in the North would fail to reduce the flow of supplies sufficiently to restrict military operations. Prospects are dim that an air interdiction campaign against LOC's leading out of Haiphong alone could cut off the flow of seaborne imports and isolate Haiphong. 41/

In late November the Chiefs sent the Secretary still another and far more detailed memo describing their plans for the conduct of all aspects of the war for the ensuing four months. In it they spelled out requests for expanding the air war against 24 new targets. They desired authorization once again to mine the harbors of Haiphong, Hon Gai, and Cam Pha noting that bad weather in the coming months would force curtailment of much normal strike activity in the Red River delta. The harbor mining was offered as the most effective means of shutting off supplies to the North. The CIA analysis previously referred to had, however, also rejected such mining proposals as unlikely to succeed in their objective of cutting off imports to support the war, although they would raise the costs to the DRV.

Political considerations aside, the combined interdiction of land and water routes, including the mining of the water approaches to the major ports and the bombing of ports and transshipment facilities, would be the most effective

type of interdiction campaign. This program would increase the hardships imposed on North Vietnam and raise further the costs of the support of the war in the South. It would, however, not be able to cut off the flow of essential supplies and, by itself, would not be the determining factor in shaping Hanoi's outlook toward the war. 42/

In addition to mining the harbors, the Chiefs requested that the comprehensive prohibition of attacks in the Hanoi/Haiphong areas be removed with the expected increase in civilian casualties to be accepted as militarily justified and necessary. They suggested as an alternative a 3 n.m. "restricted" area for the very center of Hanoi and a similar zone of 1.5 n.m. for Haiphong. They also requested the expansion of SEADRAGON naval activity north of 21.30° all the way to the Chinese border, and authorization of all the remaining targets on the JCS ROLLING THUNDER list. 43/ In spite of all these requests for expansion of the war (as well as several others for expanding the ground war in South Vietnam and operations in Laos and Cambodia), the Chiefs avoided the kind of vaunted claims for success from such new steps that had characterized past recommendations. This time they cautiously noted, "...there are no new programs which can be undertaken under current policy guidelines which would result in a rapid or significantly more visible increase in the rate of progress in the near term." 44/

The Chiefs 24-target proposal was considered at the Tuesday lunch on December 5, but no action was taken. A memo from Warnke to McNamara gives a clue as to why, "I have been informed that Secretary Rusk will not be prepared to consider the individual merits of the 24 unauthorized targets proposed and discussed in the JCS Four Months Plan." 45/ On December 16, McNamara and Rusk did reach agreement on ten new targets from the 24 target list including seven within the 10-mile Hanoi radius and two within the 4-mile Haiphong perimeter. 46/ Disapproved were five Haiphong port targets and the mining proposal.

None of the increased war activity over North Vietnam which these decisions authorized, however, would be able to prevent the enemy's massive offensive the following January. The fact that the President had acceded to the wishes of the military and the political pressures from Congress on this vital issue at this point when all the evidence available to McNamara suggested the continuing ineffectiveness of the bombing must have been an important if not determining factor in the Secretary's decision in November to retire. For the moment, however, the escalation continued.

As always, the President moved cautiously in allowing some military expansion of the air war in the fall of 1967. By the end of October, 6 of the 7 MIG-capable airfields which Secretary McNamara had

taken a strong stand against in the Stennis hearings had been hit, and only 5 of the August list of 57 recommended targets (which had meanwhile grown to 70 as new recommendations were made) remained unstruck. Thus, except for the port of Haiphong and a few others, virtually all of the economic and military targets in NVN that could be considered even remotely significant had been hit. Except for simply keeping it up, almost everything bombing could do to pressure NVN had been done.

In early December Defense spokesmen announced that the U.S. bombing in North and South Vietnam together had just topped the total of 1,544,463 tons dropped by U.S. forces in the entire European Theater during World War II. Of the 1,630,500 tons dropped, some 864,000 tons were dropped on NVN, already more than the 635,000 tons dropped during the Korean War or the 503,000 tons dropped in the Pacific Theater during World War II. 47/

4. The Decibel Level Goes Up

The purely military problems of the war aside, the President was also experiencing great difficulty in maintaining public support for this conduct of the war in the fall of 1967.

With the apparent failure of the San Antonio formula to start negotiations, the acrimony and shrillness of the public debate over the war reached new levels. The "hawks" had had their day during the Stennis hearings and the slow squeeze escalation that followed the failure of the Paris contacts. Among the "doves" the new escalation was greeted by new and more forceful outcries from the critics of the war. On October 12, the very day that Rusk was castigating the North Vietnamese in his press conference for their stubbornness, thirty dovish Congressmen sent the President an open letter complaining about the inconsistency of the recent bombing targets and Secretary McNamara's testimony during the Stennis hearings:

The bombing of targets close to the Chinese border, and of the port cities of Cam Pha and Haiphong conflicts with the carefully reasoned and factual analysis presented prior to those steps by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara on August 25, 1967. We refer particularly to the Secretary's contention that 'our resort to a less selective campaign of air attack against the North would involve risks which at present I regard as too high to accept for this dubious prospect of successful risks.' 48/

On the basis of McNamara's recommendations, the Congressmen urged the President to stop the bombing and start negotiations.

While this public identification of the inconsistency of the positions taken by various members of the Administration was embarrassing, a more serious problem was the massive anti-war demonstration organized in Washington on October 21. The leaders of the "New Left" assembled some 50,000 anti-war protestors in the Capitol on this October Saturday and staged a massive march on the Pentagon. While the "politics of confrontation" may be distasteful to the majority of Americans, the sight of thousands of peaceful demonstrators being confronted by troops in battle gear cannot have been reassuring to the country as a whole nor to the President in particular. And as if to add insult to injury, an impudent and dovish Senator McCarthy announced in November that he would be a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President. He stated his intention of running in all the primaries and of taking the Vietnam war to the American people in a direct challenge to an incumbent President and the leader of his own party.

To counter these assaults on his war policy from the left, the President dramatically called home Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland (the latter to discuss troop levels and requests as well) in November and sent them out to publicly defend the conduct of the war and the progress that had been achieved. Bunker spoke to the Overseas Press Club in New York on November 17 and stressed the progress that the South Vietnamese were making in their efforts to achieve democratic self-government and to assume a larger burden of the war. General Westmoreland addressed the National Press Club in Washington on November 21 and outlined his own four-phase plan for the defeat of the Viet Cong and their North Vietnamese sponsors. He too dwelled on the progress achieved to date and the increasing effectiveness of the South Vietnamese forces. Neither discussed the air war in the North in any serious way, however, and that was the issue that was clearly troubling the American public the most.

C. New Studies

1. SEACABIN

In the early winter of 1967-68 several new studies of the bombing were completed within the Government and by contract researchers all of which had some bearing on the deliberations of February and March 1968 when the next major reassessment took place. The first of these was entitled SEACABIN, short for "Study of the Political-Military Implications in Southeast Asia of the Cessation of Aerial Bombardment and the Initiation of Negotiations." It was a study done by the Joint Staff and ISA to specifically address the question of what could be expected from a cessation of the bombing and the beginning of negotiations, a possibility that seemed imminent at the time of the President's San Antonio speech in September. As it turned out, the time was not ripe. The study, however, was an important effort by the Defense Department to anticipate such a contingency.

Summarizing its findings and conclusions, the SEACABIN report began with a general assessment of the role of the bombing in the war:

Role of Bombardment. There are major difficulties and uncertainties in a precise assessment of the bombing program on NVN. These include inadequate data on logistic flow patterns, limited information on imports into NVN, season effects of weather, and the limitations of reconnaissance. But it is clear that the air and naval campaigns against NVN are making it difficult and costly for the DRV to continue effective support of the VC. Our operations have inflicted heavy damage on equipment and facilities, inhibited resupply, compounded distribution problems, and limited the DRV's capability to undertake sustained large-scale military operations in SVN. The economic situation in NVN is becoming increasingly difficult for the enemy. However, as a result of extensive diversion of manpower and receipt of large-scale military and economic assistance from communist countries, the DRV has retained the capability to support military operations in SVN at current levels. A cessation of the bombing program would make it possible for the DRV to regenerate its military and economic posture and substantially increase the flow of personnel and supplies from NVN to SVN. 49/

Implications of a bombing halt were dealt with in terms of advantages to the DRV and risks to the U.S. In the former category, the SEACABIN Study Group concluded as follows:

D. IMPLICATIONS OF A CESSATION OF BOMBARDMENT

6. For DRV: Potential Gains

a. Potential DRV Responses. Following a cessation of bombardment in return for its acceptance of the President's offer, the DRV could choose among one of three potential alternative courses of action: (1) to pursue an immediate-pay-off, short-term strategy of advantage; (2) to enter discussions with no intention of settling, while pursuing either its present strategy, or a revised political/military strategy of gaining a long-term advantage in SVN; and (3) to negotiate meaningfully within the United States. Under all courses, the immediate action of the DRV would be to reconstitute its LOC, stockpile near its borders, and begin general repairs of its war damage.

b. DRV Reaction Time and US Detection of Changes

(1) Under conditions of bombing, NVN units and infiltration groups have taken from only a few days up to eight months to infiltrate to a CTZ. US detection and identification may take up to six months, or longer, and confirmation even longer. Following cessation, infiltration rates would be brought closer to minimum time.

(2) Given its present capability to expand its training base by almost 100%, the DRV could achieve a significant increase in present pipeline level of infiltration in about 3 months following decision to expand its training base.

(3) The DRV could regenerate major segments of its economic infrastructure in 6 months, its LOC in NVN in 30-60 days, its logistic system in 12 months. Port congestion would be alleviated. Material transit time would be significantly reduced.

c. Capabilities Over Time

10-15 days:

-- reinforce NVA forces at DMZ with up to 5 division equivalents. Allied/enemy battalion ratios in I CTZ could shift from 1.7/1 to 0.9/1

--increase artillery bombardment from beyond DMZ, and reinforce AAA and SAM units.

30-60 days:

--Restore to operational use major ports and LOC within NVN, to include RR, highway, and combination RR/highway bridges; airfields; and over half of the vehicle repair facilities.

--Accomplish a restructuring (depots, shelters, alternate routes) of the logistic system within NVN to increase the flexibility of the LOC in Laos.

2-6 months:

--Achieve undetected a new position of military advantage in SVN, through increased infiltration, with at least two divisions in place in SVN, and three others in transit.

--Transfer to military service, from NVN LOC maintenance and construction, managerial and supervisory personnel to alleviate the apparent shortage of leaders.

d. DRV Constraints. These considerations probably would continue to constrain DRV's choices among options at cessation:

(1) Strategy of protracted war. The DRV would probably continue to put at risk in SVN only those minimum forces it considers necessary to prosecute its strategy of protracted war.

(2) Fear of US invasion.

(3) Desire to preserve appearance of VC primacy in SVN.

(4) Limitations on ability to transfer trained personnel and leadership to SVN because of possibility of US resumption of attacks on NVN.

(5) DRV may be miscalculating the progress of the war in SVN. 50/

Obviously these potential advantages to the DRV involved reciprocal risk for the U.S. in curtailing the bombing. As the SEACABIN group saw them they were the following:

7. For US: Potential Risk

a. To Operations in SVN. The most far-reaching risk is an increase in enemy combat strength that may well go undetected by the US/RVN/FWMAF. Additionally, the US position could be disadvantaged by:

(1) Movements of heavy artillery and AAA.

(2) Loss of US supporting fire at DMZ.

(3) Increased threat from DMZ and border area.

(4) Impairment of pacification program.

(5) Lowering of morale of US/RVN/FWMAF.

(6) Resulting pressures to cease bombing in Laos.

(7) Vulnerability of barrier system.

b. Possible Offset: Present bombardment forces could be reallocated to SVN and Laos missions.

c. Critical Times to Offset Risks. US should enter cessation resolved to limit the time for DRV response generally as follows:

--Discussions should begin within 30-60 days of cessation.

--Discussions should be productive within four months of cessation; i.e., actions are being taken or are agreed to be taken to reduce the threats posed by the NVN to the achievement of US/GVN military objectives in SVN. 51/

The international reaction to a bombing halt was expected to be entirely positive, hence not a problem for analysis. The study postulated that the DRV would seek to prolong the bombing halt but try to maintain a level of military activity below the provocative that would maintain its strengths in the war while trying to erode the U.S. position through protracted negotiations. In approaching a bombing halt, the U.S. could escalate before it, de-escalate before it, or maintain the current intensity of combat. The latter course was recommended as the best method of demonstrating continued U.S. resolution in anticipation of a dramatic act of restraint. With respect to the negotiations themselves, the SEACABIN Group cautioned against the U.S. being trapped in the kind of protracted negotiations we experienced in Korea while the enemy took military advantage of the bombing suspension. To guard against this, unilateral verification was essential through continued aerial surveillance. To round out their recommendations, the SEACABIN Group looked at the reasons and methods of resuming bombing if required.

H. THE RESUMPTION OF BOMBARDMENT

18. Resumption - When. The conditions under which the bombardment of NVN should be resumed cannot be determined in advance with assurance. However, the US/RVN should

probably resume bombardment whenever one or more of the following situations are perceived:

a. The security of US/RVN/FWMAF in northern I CTZ is threatened by enemy reinforcements.

b. No discussions are in prospect 30-60 days after cessation.

c. Discussions or negotiations are not productive of militarily significant DRV/NLF concessions within four months.

d. The DRV has infiltrated significant new forces into SVN -- the raising of the NVA force level in SVN by a division equivalent or more (over 10%) is judged to be sufficient provocation.

e. An enemy attack of battalion size or larger is initiated while a cease-fire is in effect.

19. Resumption - How. Actual resumption of bombardment of NVN should be preceded by a program of actions which:

a. Demonstrate (to those who are able to make an objective judgment) that the DRV is taking advantage of the cessation in a way which is exposing US/RVN/FWMAF and the people of SVN to substantially increased dangers.

b. To the maximum practicable extent, demonstrate or encourage the conclusion that the DRV is, in fact, the aggressor in SVN.

c. After the maximum political advantage has been derived from the above actions and in the absence of an acceptable response from NVN, resume aerial and naval bombardment of NVN without restrictions on any militarily significant targets. Attacks should be planned to achieve maximum impact and with due regard to the advantages of surprise. 52/

The ISA/Joint Staff analysis closed with an appraisal of the overall value of a bombing halt in the context of negotiations with the DRV. Summing up, they said;

21. On balance, that DRV response to the US offer which carries with it the greatest risk to the United

States militarily is an ambiguous response in which the DRV would appear to engage in productive talks in order to gain time to concurrently regenerate support facilities in NVN and gradually build up personnel strength and support bases in Laos, Cambodia and SVN, without overt and visible provocation. Once discussions were initiated and extended for 2-6 months, the DRV would expect world pressure to exercise a heavy restraint on resumption of bombardment -- in fact, to prevent it in the absence of a demonstrable provocation of considerable consequence.

22. US intelligence evaluations of the impact of bombardment on NVN are sufficiently uncertain as to cast doubt on any judgment that aerial and naval bombardment is or is not establishing some upper limit on the DRV's ability to support the war in SVN. The effect on NVN itself is equally uncertain. If NVN is being seriously hurt by bombardment, the price for cessation should be high. However, if NVN can continue indefinitely to accommodate to bombardment, negotiation leverage from cessation -- or a credible threat of resumption -- is likely to be substantially less. A penalty to the United States of undervaluing the impact of bombardment of NVN would be an unnecessarily weak negotiating stance. 53/

In their final paragraphs, the Study Group turned to the question of DRV good faith. The President's statement that bombing could halt and negotiations begin if we had assurances that the DRV would "not take advantage" of our restraint obliged us to look at which we would regard as a violation of that principle.

27. It has not been possible to detect and measure increased infiltration into SVN until 4-6 months have elapsed. If discussions following a cessation of bombardment are protracted, the enemy could take advantage of the opportunity for increased infiltration with confidence that detection would be so slow and uncertain that insufficient provocation could be demonstrated to justify termination of talks or resumption of bombardment. The following are minimum acceptable actions which operationally define "not take advantage."

a. Stop artillery fire from and over the DMZ into SVN prior to or immediately upon cessation.

b. Agree that for the DRV to increase over the current level the flow of personnel and materiel south of

19° N latitude would be to take advantage of cessation and that it will refrain from doing so.

c. Accept "open skies" over NVN upon cessation.

d. Withdraw from the DMZ within a specified time, say two weeks, after cessation.

28. Cessation of bombing of NVN for any protracted period while continuing the war in SVN would be difficult to reconcile with any increase in US casualties.

29. If the DRV/NLF act in good faith, formal negotiations toward a cessation of hostilities should begin within two months after a cessation of bombardment. Preliminary discussions lasting any longer than two months will require a resumption of bombardment or the application of other pressures as appropriate. 54/

As a document, the SEACABIN study was important because it represented a first major effort to pull together a positive DOD position on the question of a bombing halt. The analysis and recommendations were compromises to be sure, but they were formulations that gave the Administration room for maneuver in approaching the problem of negotiations. Probably most importantly they established a basis of cooperation and collaboration between the Joint Staff and ISA on this issue that would be useful during the crisis of the following March when a new direction was being sought for the whole U.S. effort in Vietnam.

In mid-December, the Chiefs themselves sent the Secretary a memo noting that the SEACABIN study was the product of staff work and did not necessarily reflect the views of the JCS. The Chiefs stressed again their belief in the effectiveness of the bombing in punishing North Vietnamese aggression, and recorded their opposition to a halt in the bombing as a means of starting negotiations. North Vietnamese performance on the battlefield and diplomatically clearly indicated their unwillingness to enter negotiations except as a means of handicapping American power. Such a bombing halt would also endanger the lives of U.S. troops. Thus, while the study had been a useful exercise, the Secretary was advised against any endorsement of a cessation of bombing. 55/

2. The JASON Study

While DOD was internally examining bombing suspension scenarios, IDA's JASON division had called together many of the people who had participated in the 1966 Summer Study for another look at the effectiveness of the bombing and at various alternatives that might get

better results. Their report was submitted in mid-December 1967 and was probably the most categorical rejection of bombing as a tool of our policy in Southeast Asia to be made before or since by an official or semi-official group. The study was done for McNamara and closely held after completion. It was completed after his decision to leave the Pentagon, but it was a powerful confirmation of the positions on the bombing that he had taken in the internal councils of the government over the preceding year.

The study evaluated the bombing in terms of its achievement of the objectives that Secretary McNamara had defined for it:

Secretary McNamara on August 25, 1967 restated the objectives of the bombing campaign in North Vietnam. These objectives are:

1. To reduce the flow and/or to increase the cost of the continued infiltration of men and supplies from North to South Vietnam.
2. To raise the morale of the South Vietnamese people who, at the time the bombing started, were under severe military pressure.
3. To make clear to the North Vietnamese political leadership that so long as they continued their aggression against the South, they would have to pay a price in the North. 56/

Taking up the first of these stated objectives, the JASON study reached an emphatically negative conclusion about the results from ROLLING THUNDER:

As of October 1967, the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam has had no measurable effect on Hanoi's ability to mount and support military operations in the South. North Vietnam supports operations in the South mainly by functioning as a logistic funnel and providing a source of manpower, from an economy in which manpower has been widely under-utilized. Most of the essential military supplies that the VC/NVA forces in the South require from external sources are provided by the USSR, Eastern Europe, and Communist China. Furthermore, the volume of such supplies is so low that only a small fraction of the capacity of North Vietnam's flexible transportation network is required to maintain that flow.

In the face of Rolling Thunder strikes on NVN, the bombing of infiltration routes in Laos, the U.S. naval operations along the Vietnamese coast, and the tactical

bombing of South Vietnam, North Vietnam infiltrated over 86,000 men in 1966. At the same time, it has also built up the strength of its armed forces at home, and acquired sufficient confidence in its supply and logistic organization to equip VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam with a modern family of imported 7.62mm weapons which require externally supplied ammunition. Moreover, NVN has the potential to continue building the size of its armed forces, to increase the yearly total of infiltration of individual soldiers and combat units, and to equip and supply even larger forces in South Vietnam for substantially higher rates of combat than those which currently prevail.

Since the beginning of the Rolling Thunder air strikes on NVN, the flow of men and materiel from NVN to SVN has greatly increased, and present evidence provides no basis for concluding that the damage inflicted on North Vietnam by the bombing program has had any significant effect on this flow. In short, the flow of men and materiel from North Vietnam to the South appears to reflect Hanoi's intentions rather than capabilities even in the face of the bombing.

NVN's ability to increase the rate of infiltration of men and materiel into SVN is not currently limited by its supply of military manpower, by its LOC capabilities, by the availability of transport carriers, or by its access to materials and supplies. The VC/NVA are effectively limited by constraints of the situation in the South -- including the capacity of the VC infrastructure and distribution system to support additional materiel and troops -- but even given these constraints could support a larger force in the South. The inference which we have drawn from these findings is that NVN determines and achieves the approximate force levels that they believe are needed to sustain a war of attrition for an extended period of time.

Despite heavy attacks on NVN's logistic system, manufacturing capabilities, and supply stores, its ability to sustain the war in the South has increased rather than decreased during the Rolling Thunder strikes. It has become increasingly less vulnerable to aerial interdiction aimed at reducing the flow of men and materiel from the North to the South because it has made its transportation system more redundant, reduced the size and increased the number of depots and eliminated choke points.

The bombing of North Vietnam has inflicted heavy costs not so much to North Vietnam's military capability or its infiltration system as to the North Vietnamese economy as a whole. Measurable physical damage now exceeds \$370 million and the regime has had to divert 300,000 to 600,000 people (many on a part-time basis) from agricultural and other tasks to counter the bombing and cope with its effects. The former cost has been more than met by aid from other Communist countries. The latter cost may not be real, since the extra manpower needs have largely been met from what was a considerable amount of slack in NVN's underemployed agricultural labor force. Manpower resources are apparently still adequate to operate the agricultural economy at a tolerable level and to continue simultaneously to support the war in SVN and maintain forces for the defense of the North at current or increased levels.

Virtually all of the military and economic targets in North Vietnam that can be considered even remotely significant have been struck, except for a few targets in Hanoi and Haiphong. Almost all modern industrial output has been halted and the regime has gone over to decentralized, dispersed, and/or protected modes of producing and handling essential goods, protecting the people, and supporting the war in the South. NVN has shown that it can find alternatives to conventional bridges and they continue to operate trains in the face of air strikes.

NVN has transmitted many of the material costs imposed by the bombing back to its allies. Since the bombing began, NVN's allies have provided almost \$600 million in economic aid and another \$1 billion in military aid -- more than four times what NVN has lost in bombing damage. If economic criteria were the only consideration, NVN would show a substantial net gain from the bombing, primarily in military equipment.

Because of this aid, and the effectiveness of its countermeasures, NVN's economy continues to function. NVN's adjustments to the physical damage, disruption, and other difficulties brought on by the bombing have been sufficiently effective to maintain living standards, meet transportation requirements, and improve its military capabilities. NVN is now a stronger military power than before the bombing and its remaining economy is more able to withstand bombing. The USSR could furnish NVN with much more sophisticated weapon systems; these could further increase the military strength of NVN and lead to larger U.S. losses. 57/

These conclusions were supported copiously in a separate volume of the study devoted specifically to such analysis. The second objective of the bombing, to raise South Vietnamese morale, had been substantially achieved. There had been an appreciable improvement in South Vietnamese morale immediately after the bombing began and subsequent buoyancy always accompanied major new escalations of the air war. But the effect was always transient, fading as a particular pattern of attack became a part of the routine of the war. There was no indication that bombing could ever constitute a permanent support for South Vietnamese morale if the situation in the South itself was adverse.

The third function of the bombing, as described by McNamara, was psychological -- to win the test of wills with Hanoi by showing U.S. determination and intimidating DRV leaders about the future. The failure of the bombing in this area, according to the JASON study, had been as signal as in purely military terms.

The bombing campaign against NVN has not discernably weakened the determination of the North Vietnamese leaders to continue to direct and support the insurgency in the South. Shortages of food and clothing, travel restrictions, separations of families, lack of adequate medical and educational facilities, and heavy work loads have tended to affect adversely civilian morale. However, there are few if any reliable reports on a breakdown of the commitment of the people to support the war. Unlike the situation in the South, there are no reports of marked increases of absenteeism, draft dodging, black market operations or prostitution. There is no evidence that possible war weariness among the people has shaken the leadership's belief that they can continue to endure the bombing and outlast the U.S. and SVN in a protracted war of attrition.

Long term plans for the economic development have not been abandoned but only set aside for the duration of the war. The regime continues to send thousands of young men and women abroad for higher education and technical training; we consider this evidence of the regime's confidence of the eventual outcome of the war.

The expectation that bombing would erode the determination of Hanoi and its people clearly overestimated the persuasive and disruptive effects of the bombing and, correspondingly, underestimated the tenacity and recuperative capabilities of the North Vietnamese. That the bombing has not achieved anticipated goals reflects a general failure to appreciate the fact, well-documented in the historical

and social scientific literature, that a direct, frontal attack on a society tends to strengthen the social fabric of the nation, to increase popular support of the existing government, to improve the determination of both the leadership and the populace to fight back, to induce a variety of protective measures that reduce the society's vulnerability to future attack and to develop an increased capacity for quick repairs and restoration of essential functions. The great variety of physical and social countermeasures that North Vietnam has taken in response to the bombing is now well documented but the potential effectiveness of these countermeasures has not been adequately considered in previous planning or assessment studies. 58/

The JASON study took a detailed look at alternative means of applying our air power in an effort to determine if some other combination of targets and tactics would achieve better results. Nine different strategies were examined including mining the ports, attacking the dikes and various combinations of attack emphasis on the LOC systems. This was the emphatic conclusion: "We are unable to devise a bombing campaign in the North to reduce the flow of infiltrating personnel into SVN." 59/ All that could really be said was that some more optimum employment of U.S. air resources could be devised in terms of target damage and LOC disruption. None could reduce the flow even close to the essential minimum for sustaining the war in the South.

After having requested that some portions of the study be reworked to eliminate errors of logic, Mr. Warnke forwarded the final version to Secretary McNamara on January 3, 1968 with the information copies to Secretary Rusk, the Joint Chiefs and CINCPAC. In his memo he noted the similarity of the conclusions on bombing effectiveness to those reached not long before in the study by the CIA (see above). Specifically, Mr. Warnke noted that, "Together with SEA CABIN, the study supports the proposition that a bombing pause -- even for a significant period of time -- would not add appreciably to the strength of our adversary in South Vietnam." Thus was laid the analytical groundwork for the President's decision to partially curtail the bombing in March. 61/

3. Systems Analysis Study on Economic Effects

An unrelated but complementary study of the economic effects of the bombing on North Vietnam was completed by Systems Analysis right after the New Year and sent to the Secretary. It too came down hard on the unproductiveness of the air war, even to the point of suggesting that it might be counter-productive in pure economic terms. Enthoven's cover memo to McNamara stated,

...the bombing has not been very successful in imposing economic losses on the North. Losses in domestic production have been more than replaced by imports and the availability of manpower, particularly because of the natural growth in the labor force, has been adequate to meet wartime needs. It is likely that North Vietnam will continue to be able to meet extra manpower and economic requirements caused by the bombing short of attacks on population centers or the cities. 62/

The paper itself examined two aspects of the problem: the impact of the bombing on GNP and on labor supply/utilization. The most telling part of the analysis was the demonstration that imports had more than offset the cost of the war to the North in simple GNP terms as the following passage shows:

II. Effects on North Vietnam's Gross National Product

Prior to 1965, the growth rate of the North Vietnamese economy averaged 6% per year. It is estimated that this rate continued (and even increased slightly) during 1965 and 1966, the first two years of the bombing (Table 1). In 1967, however, domestically-produced GNP declined sharply to only \$1,688 million -- a level roughly comparable to the prewar years of 1963 and 1964. The cumulative loss in GNP caused by the bombing in the last three years is estimated to be \$294 million (Table 2).

To offset these losses, North Vietnam has had an increased flow of foreign economic aid. Prior to the bombing, economic aid to North Vietnam averaged \$95 million annually. Since the bombing began, the flow of economic aid has increased to \$340 million per year (Table 1). The cumulative increase in economic aid in the 1965-1967 period over the 1953-1964 average has been an estimated \$490 million.

Thus, over the entire period of the bombing, the value of economic resources gained through foreign aid has been greater than that lost because of the bombing (Table 3). The cumulative foreign aid increase has been \$490 million; losses have totaled \$294 million.

In addition to the loss of current production, North Vietnam has lost an estimated \$164 million in capital assets destroyed by the bombing. These capital assets include much of North Vietnam's industrial base - its manufacturing plants, power plants, and bridges.

3.2

It is not certain that Russia and China will replace North Vietnam's destroyed capital assets through aid programs, thus absorbing part of the bombing cost themselves. However, they could do so in a short period of time at relatively small cost; if economic aid remained at its wartime yearly rate of \$340 million and half were used to replace capital stock, North Vietnam's losses could be replaced in a year. If the capital stock is replaced, the economic cost to North Vietnam of the bombing will be the cumulative loss of output from the time the bombing began until the capital stock is fully replaced. Even this probably overstates the cost, however. Even if the pre-bombing capital stock were only replaced, it would be more modern and productive than it otherwise would have been.

While the aggregate supply of goods in North Vietnam has remained constant, standards of living may have declined. The composition of North Vietnam's total supply has shifted away from final consumer goods toward intermediate products related to the war effort, i.e., construction and transportation.

Food supplies, vital to the health and efficiency of North Vietnam, have been maintained with only a slight decline. As shown in Table 4, the estimated North Vietnamese daily intake of calories has fallen from 1,910 in 1963 to 1,880 in 1967. Even considering that imported wheat and potatoes are not traditional table fare in North Vietnam, the North Vietnamese are not badly off by past North Vietnamese standards or the standards of other Asian countries.

The output of industrial and handicraft output declined 35% in 1967 (Table 1). Economic aid has probably not replaced all of this decline. With lower war priority, the supply of non-food consumer goods such as textiles and durables has probably declined more than the food supply.

Despite lower standards of living, the ability of North Vietnamese government to sustain its population at a level high enough to prevent mass dissatisfaction is evident. 63/

The analysis of the manpower question in the Systems Analysis paper revealed that there was as yet no real squeeze for the North Vietnamese because of population growth. In a word, the

bombing was unable to beat the birth rate. This is how Systems Analysis assessed the problem:

III. Effects on Total North Vietnamese Manpower Supply

In addition to the economic effects, the air war has drawn North Vietnamese labor into bomb damage repair, replacement of combat casualties, construction, transportation, and air defense. Over the last three years, these needs have absorbed almost 750,000 able-bodied North Vietnamese (Table 5).

But, again there are offsetting factors. First, over 90% of the increase in manpower has been provided by population growth (Table 5). Since the start of the bombing, 720,000 able-bodied people have been added to the North Vietnamese labor force.

Second, the bombing has increased not only the demand for labor but also the supply. The destruction of much of North Vietnam's modern industry has released an estimated 33,000 workers from their jobs. Similarly, the evacuation of the cities has made an estimated 48,000 women available for work on roads and bridges in the countryside. Both of these groups of people were available for work on war-related activity with little or no extra sacrifice of production; if they weren't repairing bomb damage, they wouldn't be doing anything productive.

Third, North Vietnam has been supplied with manpower as a form of foreign aid. An estimated 40,000 Chinese are thought to be employed in maintaining North Vietnam's road and rail network.

Finally, additional workers could be obtained in North Vietnam from low productivity employment. In less developed countries, agriculture typically employs more people than are really needed to work the land, even with relatively primitive production methods. Also, further mobilization may be possible through greater use of women in the labor force. The available statistics are not precise enough to identify the magnitude of this potential labor pool, but the estimates given in Table 6 show that even after two years of war the total North Vietnamese labor force is only 54% of its population - scarcely higher than it was in 1965.

What was absent of course for both sides was any fundamental reassessment that could move either or both to modify their positions on negotiations. The DRV was at the time in the midst of the massive preparations for the Tet offensive in January while the U.S. remained buoyed by the favorable reports from the field on seeming military progress in the last months of 1967. The missing ingredient for peace moves at that time was motivation on both sides. Each had reason to wait. When, just before Christmas, Pope Paul called on the U.S. to halt the bombing and the DRV to demonstrate restraint as a step towards peace he received a personal visit from President Johnson the following day (on return from a Presidential trip to Australia). The President courteously but firmly explained the U.S. policy to the Pope, "mutual restraint" was necessary before peace talks could begin.

6

In sum, the total incremental need for war-related manpower of roughly 750,000 people appears to have been offset (Table 5) with no particular strain on the population. Future manpower needs may outstrip North Vietnamese population growth, but the North Vietnamese government can import more manpower (though there may be limits to how many Chinese they want to bring into the country), use women and/or underemployed workers, and draw workers from productive employment, replacing their output with imports. Given these options, it appears that the North Vietnamese government is not likely to be hampered by aggregate manpower shortages. 64/

D. The Year Closes on a Note of Optimism

The negative analyses of the air war, however, did not reflect the official view of the Administration, and certainly not the view of the military at any level in the command structure at year's end. The latter had, for instance, again vigorously opposed any holiday truce arrangements, and especially the suspension of the air war against North Vietnam's logistical system. 65/ On this they had been duly overruled, the holiday pauses having become the standard SOP to domestic and international war protesters. The 1967 pauses produced, as expected, no major breakthrough towards peace between the belligerents through any of their illusive diplomatic points of contact.

Contributing to the firmness of the U.S. position were the optimistic reports from the field on military progress in the war. Both statistically and qualitatively, improvement was noted throughout the last quarter of the year and a mood of cautious hope pervaded the dispatches. Typical of these was Admiral Sharp's year end wrap-up cable. Having primary command responsibility for the air war, CINCPAC devoted a major portion of his message to the ROLLING THUNDER program in 1967, presenting as he did not only his view of accomplishments in the calendar year but also a rebuttal to critics of the concept and conduct of the air war.

Admiral Sharp outlined three objectives which the air campaign was seeking to achieve: disruption of the flow of external assistance into North Vietnam, curtailment of the flow of supplies from North Vietnam into Laos and South Vietnam, and destruction "in depth" of North Vietnamese resources that contributed to the support of the war. 66/ Acknowledging that the flow of fraternal communist aid into the North had grown every year of the war, CINCPAC noted the stepped up effort in 1967 to neutralize this assistance by logistically isolating its primary port of entry -- Haiphong. The net results, he felt, had been encouraging:

The overall effect of our effort to reduce external assistance has resulted not only in destruction and damage to the transportation systems and goods being transported thereon but has created additional management, distribution and manpower problems. In addition, the attacks have created a bottleneck at Haiphong where inability effectively to move goods inland from the port has resulted in congestion on the docks and a slowdown in offloading ships as they arrive. By October, road and rail interdictions had reduced the transportation clearance capacity at Haiphong to about 2700 short tons per day. An average of 4400 short tons per day had arrived in Haiphong during the year. 67/

The assault against the continuing traffic of men and materiel through North Vietnam toward Laos and South Vietnam, however, had produced only marginal results. Success here was measured in the totals of destroyed transport, not the constriction of the flow of personnel and goods.

Although men and material needed for the level of combat now prevailing in South Vietnam continue to flow despite our attacks on LOCs, we have made it very costly to the enemy in terms of material, manpower, management, and distribution. From 1 January through 15 December 1967, 122,960 attack sorties were flown in Rolling Thunder

route packages I through V and in Laos, SEA Dragon offensive operations involved 1,384 ship-days on station and contributed materially in reducing enemy seaborne infiltration in southern NVN and in the vicinity of the DMZ. Attacks against the NVN transport system during the past 12 months resulted in destruction of carriers cargo carried, and personnel casualties. Air attacks throughout North Vietnam and Laos destroyed or camaged 5,261 motor vehicles, 2,475 railroad rolling stock, and 11,425 watercraft from 1 January through 20 December 1967. SEA DRAGON accounted for another 1,473 WBLC destroyed or damaged from 1 January - 30 November. There were destroyed rail-lines, bridges, ferries, railroad yards and shops, storage areas, and truck parks. Some 3,685 land targets were struck by Sea Dragon forces, including the destruction or damage of 303 coastal defense and radar sites. Through external assistance, the enemy has been able to replace or rehabilitate many of the items damage or destroyed, and transport inventories are roughly at the same level they were at the beginning of the year. Nevertheless, construction problems have caused interruptions in the flow of men and supplies, caused a great loss of work-hours, and restricted movement particularly during daylight hours. 68/

The admission that transport inventories were the same at year's end as when it began must have been a painful one indeed for CINCPAC in view of the enormous cost of the air campaign against the transport system in money, aircraft, and lives. As a consolation for this signal failure, CINCPAC pointed to the extensive diversion of civilian manpower to war related activities as a result of the bombing.

A primary effect of our efforts to impede movement of the enemy has been to force Hanoi to engage from 500,000 to 600,000 civilians in full-time and part-time war-related activities, in particular for air defense and repair of the LOCs. This diversion of manpower from other pursuits, particularly from the agricultural sector, has caused a drawdown on manpower. The estimated lower food production yields, coupled with an increase in food imports in 1967 (some six times that of 1966), indicate that agriculture is having great difficulty in adjusting to this hanged composition of the work force. The cost and difficulties of the war to Hanoi have sharply increased, and only through the willingness of other communist countries to provide maximum replacement of goods and material has NVN managed to sustain its war effort. 69/

To these manpower diversions CINCPAC added the cost to North Vietnam in 1967, of the destruction of vital resources -- the third of his air war objectives:

C. Destroying vital resources:

Air attacks were authorized and executed by target systems for the first time in 1967, although the attacks were limited to specific targets within each system. A total of 9,740 sorties was flown against targets on the ROLLING THUNDER target list from 1 January - 15 December 1967. The campaign against the power system resulted in reduction of power generating capability to approximately 15 percent of original capacity. Successful strikes against the Thai Nguyen iron and steel plant and the Haiphong cement plant resulted in practically total destruction of these two installations. NVN adjustments to these losses have had to be made by relying on additional imports from China, the USSR or the Eastern European countries. The requirement for additional imports reduces available shipping space for war supporting supplies and adds to the congestion at the ports. Interruptions in raw material supplies and the requirement to turn to less efficient means of power and distribution has degraded overall production.

Economic losses to North Vietnam amounted to more than \$130 million dollars in 1967, representing over one-half of the total economic losses since the war began. 70/

This defense of the importance and contribution of the air campaign to the overall effort in Vietnam was seconded by General Westmoreland later in January when he sent his year-end summary of progress to Washington. In discussing the efforts of his men on the ground in the South he described the bombing of the North as "indispensable" in cutting the flow of support and maintaining the morale of his forces. 71/ It is worth noting that COMUSMACV's optimistic assessment was dispatched just 4 days before the enemy launched his devastating Tet offensive, proving thereby a formidable capability to marshal men and materiel for massive attacks at times and places of his choosing, the bombing notwithstanding.

Less than a week later, Secretary McNamara appeared before Congress for the presentation of his last annual "posture" statement. These regular January testimonies had become an important forum in which the Secretary reviewed the events of the preceding year, presented the budget for the coming year and outlined the programs for the Defense establishment for the next five years. In all cases he had begun with a broad brush review of the international situation and in recent years

devoted a major portion of the review to the Vietnam problem. In his valedictory on February 1, 1968 (just after the beginning of Tet) he offered a far more sober appraisal of the effectiveness of the bombing than the military commanders in the field. In it he drew on much of the analysis provided to him the previous fall by the JASON and SEACABIN studies and his own systems analysts. His estimate of the bombing is perhaps the closest to being realistic ever given by the Administration and was a wise and tempered judgment to offer in the face of the enemy's impressive Tet attacks.

The air campaign against North Vietnam has included attacks on industrial facilities, fixed military targets, and the transportation system.

Attacks against major industrial facilities through 1967 have destroyed or put out of operation a large portion of the rather limited modern industrial base. About 70 percent of the North's electric generating capacity is currently out of operation, and the bulk of its fixed petroleum storage capacity has been destroyed. However, (imported diesel generators are probably producing sufficient electricity for essential services and, by dispersing their petroleum supplies, the North Vietnamese have been able to meet their minimum petroleum needs. Most, if not all, of the industrial output lost has been replaced by imports from the Soviet Union and China.

Military and economic assistance from other Communist countries, chiefly the Soviet Union, has been steadily increasing. In 1965, North-Vietnam received in aid a total of \$420 million (\$270 million military and \$150 million economic); in 1966, \$730 million (\$455 million military and \$275 million economic); and preliminary estimates indicate that total aid for 1967 may have reached \$1 billion (\$660 million military and \$340 million economic). Soviet military aid since 1965 has been concentrated on air defense materiel -- SAM's, AAA guns and ammo, radars, and fighter aircraft.

Soviet economic assistance has included trucks, railroad equipment, barges, machinery, petroleum, fertilizer, and food. China has provided help in the construction of light industry, maintenance of the transportation system and improvements in the communications and irrigation systems, plus some 30,000 to 50,000 support troops for use in North Vietnam for repair and AAA defense.

Damage inflicted by our air attacks on fixed military targets has led to the abandonment of barracks and supply

and ammunition depots and has caused a dispersal of supplies and equipment. However, North Vietnam's air defense system continues to function effectively despite increased attacks on airfields, SAM sites, and AAA positions. The supply of SAM missiles and antiaircraft ammunition appears adequate, notwithstanding our heavy attacks, and we see no indication of any permanent drop in their expenditure rates.

Our intensified air campaign against the transportation system seriously disrupted normal operations and has increased the cost and difficulties of maintaining traffic flows. Losses of transportation equipment have increased, but inventories have been maintained by imports from Communist countries. The heavy damage inflicted on key railroad and highway bridges in the Hanoi-Haiphong areas during 1967 has been largely offset by the construction of numerous bypasses and the more extensive use of inland waterways.

While our overall loss rate over North Vietnam has been decreasing steadily, from 3.4 aircraft per 1,000 sorties in 1965 to 2.1 in 1966 and to 1.9 in 1967, losses over the Hanoi-Haiphong areas have been relatively high.

The systematic air campaign against fixed economic and military target systems leaves few strategically important targets unstruck. Other than manpower, North Vietnam provides few direct resources to the war effort, which is sustained primarily by the large imports from the Communist countries. The agrarian nature of the economy precludes an economic collapse as a result of the bombing. Moreover while we can make it more costly in time and manpower, it is difficult to conceive of any interdiction campaign that would pinch off the flow of military supplies to the south as long as combat requirements remain at anything like the current low levels. 72/

VI. THE CORNER IS TURNED -- JANUARY-MARCH 1968

The Johnson Administration began 1968 in a mood of cautious hope about the course of the war. Within a month those hopes had been completely dashed. In late January and early February, the Viet Cong and their North Vietnamese supporters launched the massive Tet assault on the cities and towns of South Vietnam and put the Johnson Administration and the American public through a profound political catharsis on the wisdom and purpose of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the soundness of our policies for the conduct of the war. The crisis engendered the most soul-searching debate within the Administration about what course to take next in the whole history of the war. In the emotion laden atmosphere of those dark days, there were cries for large-scale escalation on the one side and for significant retrenchment on the other. In the end an equally difficult decision -- to stabilize the effort in the South and de-escalate in the North -- was made. One of the inescapable conclusions of the Tet experience that helped to shape that decision was that as an interdiction measure against the infiltration of men and supplies, the bombing had been a near total failure. Moreover, it had not succeeded in breaking Hanoi's will to continue the fight. The only other major justification for continuing the bombing was its punitive value, and that began to pale in comparison with the potential (newly perceived by many) of its suspension for producing negotiations with the DRV, or failing that a large propaganda windfall for the U.S. negotiating position. The President's dramatic decision at the end of March capped a long month of debate. Adding force to the President's announcement of the partial bombing halt was his own personal decision not to seek re-election.

A. The Crisis Begins

1. Public Diplomacy Gropes On

Following Ambassador Harriman's visit to Bucharest in November 1967 the next move in the dialogue of the deaf between Hanoi and Washington was a slightly new formulation of the North Vietnamese position by Foreign Minister Trinh on December 29. Speaking at a reception at the Mongolian Embassy he stated:

After the United States has ended the bombing and all other acts of war, North Vietnam will hold talks with the United States on questions concerned.

By shifting his tense from the "could" of his 28 January 1967 statement to "will", Trinh had moved his position just slightly closer to that of the U.S. This statement was, no doubt, a part of a secret diplomatic dialogue, possibly through the Rumanians, that must have continued into the new year. The State Department readily acknowledged that Trinh's

statement was a "new formulation," but quickly pointed out that it had been prefaced by a reaffirmation of the four points and did not deal with the specifics of when, where and how negotiations would take place. 2/

Rusk's efforts to downplay the significance of the Trinh statement notwithstanding, it can be assumed that some U.S. response was sent to Hanoi. Reinforcing this impression is the fact that on January 3 bombing was again completely prohibited within 5 n.m. of both Hanoi and Haiphong for an indefinite period. 3/ (Some confusion may arise as to the various constraints that were placed on the bombing near the two major cities at different times and for different radii. "Prohibited" meant that no strikes had been or would be authorized; "restricted" meant that the area was generally off limits but that individual targets, on a case by case basis, might be approved by "highest authority" for a single attack. The 30 n.m. restricted zone around Hanoi and its 10 n.m. counterpart around Haiphong had existed since the beginning of the bombing in 1965. The prohibited zones were established in December 1966. In 1967 they had been 10 n.m. for Hanoi and 4 n.m. for Haiphong.) On January 16 when the White House Luncheon group met they authorized only two targets that McNamara and Rusk had not already agreed to in December and they specifically reaffirmed the prohibition around the two cities. 4/

The following day, the President, in his annual State of the Union address, softened somewhat the U.S. position in what may have been intended as a message to Hanoi. He called for "serious" negotiations rather than the "productive" talks he had asked for in the San Antonio speech. Unfortunately, he also stated that the North Vietnamese "must not take advantage of our restraint as they have in the past." 5/ News-men mistakenly took this for a hardening of the U.S. position by the President, an error Dean Rusk tried to dispel the following day. But, as on many occasions in the past, if this was intended as a signal to Hanoi it must have been a confusing one. Once again the problem of multiple audiences scrambled the communication. Not surprisingly then, on January 21, Nham Dan, the official North Vietnamese newspaper condemned the San Antonio formula as the "habitual trick" of the President who was attempting to impose "very insolent conditions" on Hanoi. The U.S. had no right to ask reciprocity for a cessation of the bombing since it was the aggressor. 6/

His intent having been misconstrued, the President used the next most convenient opportunity to convey his message -- the confirmation hearings of the Senate Armed Services Committee on the appointment of his close friend and advisor, Clark Clifford, to be Secretary of Defense. In the course of his testimony, Clifford replied to questions by Senator Strom Thurmond about the timing and conditions the Administration intended for a bombing halt. Here is the essential portion of that testimony:

SENATOR THURMOND:....This morning you testified about the large quantities of goods that were brought in during the cessation of bombing, and in view of your experience and your knowledge, and the statements you made this morning, I presume that you would not favor cessation of bombing where American lives would be jeopardized?

MR. CLIFFORD: I would not favor the cessation of bombing under present circumstances. I would express the fervent hope that we could stop the bombing if we had some kind of reciprocal word from North Vietnam that they wanted to sit down and, in good faith, negotiate.

I would say only that as I go into this task, the deepest desire that I have is to bring hostilities in Vietnam to a conclusion under those circumstances that permit us to have a dignified and honorable result that in turn will obtain for the South Vietnamese that goal which we have made such sacrifices to attain.

SENATOR THURMOND: When you spoke of negotiating, in which case you would be willing to have a cessation of bombing, I presume you would contemplate that they would stop their military activities, too, in return for a cessation of bombing.

MR. CLIFFORD: No, that is not what I said.

I do not expect them to stop their military activities. I would expect to follow the language of the President when he said that if they would agree to start negotiations promptly and not take advantage of the pause in the bombing.

SENATOR THURMOND: What do you mean by taking advantage if they continue their military activities?

MR. CLIFFORD: Their military activity will continue in South Vietnam, I assume, until there is a cease fire agreed upon. I assume that they will continue to transport the normal amount of goods, munitions, and men, to South Vietnam. I assume that we will continue to maintain our forces and support our forces during that period. So what I am suggesting, in the language of the President is, that he would insist that they not take advantage of the suspension of the bombing. 7/

Several days later, the Clifford testimony was confirmed by the State Department as the position of the U.S. Government. This, then, was the final public position taken by the Administration prior to the launching of the Tet offensive by the enemy on January 30. While it amounted to a further softening, it was still considerably short of the unconditional cessation the North Vietnamese were demanding. In the aftermath of the Tet attack, both sides would scale down their demands in the interests of opening a direct dialogue.

2. The Tet Offensive

As planned, the Allies began a 36-hour truce in honor of the Tet holidays on January 29. The order was shortly cancelled, however, because of fierce enemy attacks in the northern provinces. Then, suddenly on January 31, the Viet Cong and NVA forces launched massive assaults on virtually every major city and provincial capital, and most of the military installations in South Vietnam. In Saigon, attackers penetrated the new American Embassy and the Palace grounds before they were driven back. Whole sections of the city were under Viet Cong control temporarily. In Hue an attacking force captured virtually the entire city including the venerable Citadel, seat of the ancient capital of Vietnam and cultural center of the country. Everywhere the fighting was intense and the casualties, civilian as well as military, were staggering. Coming on the heels of optimistic reports from the field commands, this offensive caught official Washington off guard and stunned both the Administration and the American public. The Viet Cong blatantly announced their aim as the overthrow of the Saigon regime. But the Allied forces fought well and the main thrust of the attacks on Saigon, Danang, and elsewhere were blunted with the enemy suffering enormous casualties. Only in Hue did the communists succeed in capturing the city temporarily. There the fighting continued as the most costly of the war for nearly a month before the Viet Cong were finally rooted out of their strongholds.

The lesson of the Tet offensive concerning the bombing should have been unmistakably clear for its proponents and critics alike. Bombing to interdict the flow of men and supplies to the South had been a signal failure. The resources necessary to initiate an offensive of Tet proportions and sustain the casualties and munitions expenditures it entailed had all flowed south in spite of the heavy bombing in North Vietnam, Laos and South Vietnam. It was now clear that bombing alone could not prevent the communists from amassing the materiel, and infiltrating the manpower necessary to conduct massive operations if they chose. Moreover, Tet demonstrated that the will to undergo the required sacrifices and hardships was more than ample.

The initial military reaction in Washington appears to have been addressed to the air war. On February 3, the Chiefs sent the

Secretary a memo renewing their earlier proposal for reducing the restricted zone around Hanoi and Haiphong to 3 and 1.5 n.m. respectively, with field authority granted to make strikes as required outside. The memo opened with a reference to the Tet offensive: "Through his buildup at Khe Sanh and actions throughout South Vietnam during the past week, the enemy has shown a major capability for waging war in the South." 8/ In view of the evident ineffectiveness of the bombing in preventing the offensive, the succeeding sentence in the memo, providing the justification for the request, can only appear as a *non sequitur*: "The air campaign against NVN should be conducted to achieve maximum effect in reducing this enemy capability." 9/

The arguments against such authorization were formulated by ISA. Mr. Warnke observed that:

In addition to the lines of communication that would be opened for attack by shrinking the control areas around Hanoi and Haiphong only a couple of fixed targets not previously authorized would be released for strike. These targets do not appear to have large civilian casualties or other political liabilities associated with them. A description of these targets is attached. (Tab B) The major effects thus would be (1) to open to armed forces attack the primary and secondary LOCs between the present "regular" 10 and 4 mile circles and the proposed 3 and 1-1/2 mile circles, and, if the Joint Staff interpretation is accepted, (2) to release for strike the previously authorized targets within the "special" 5 mile circles. 10/

Other considerations also argued in favor of deferring action on this proposal for the moment:

I recommend that, if this proposal is accepted, the new circles be treated as containing areas where no strikes are to be made without new individual authorization. In any event, I believe the present restrictions should be continued pending the return of the 3 American PWs who have been designated by Hanoi for release. Our information is that these men will be picked up by 2 American pacifists who are leaving from Vientiane, Laos, for Hanoi on the next available flight. The next scheduled ICC flight to Hanoi is on 9 February. 11/

The issue was probably raised at the White House Luncheon on February 6, but the JCS proposal was not approved. Strikes against targets in Haiphong apparently were authorized, however, since the first such raids in over a month took place on February 10. These, however, were only the most immediate reactions to the trauma of Tet 1968. To be sure, as

time went on, the air war would be shoved aside somewhat by considerations of force augmentation in the south -- the principle concern after the massive Viet Cong attack. Bombing as an issue would more and more be considered in relation to the possibility of negotiations and the improvement of the U.S. diplomatic position. The failure of the bombing to interdict infiltration and break Hanoi's will meant that it could be militarily justified for the future only as a punitive measure. Nevertheless, many in the Pentagon would continue to advocate its expansion. As events moved forward this punitive value would gradually seem less and less important to the President compared with the potential of a bombing suspension (even partial) for producing serious peace negotiations and/or appeasing public opinion. For the moment, however, the Tet assault appeared only as a massive repudiation of U.S. peace overtures, hardly something to warrant a reduction in our side of the conflict.

On Sunday, February 4, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara appeared jointly on a special one-hour program of "Meet the Press" to answer questions primarily about the Tet offensive. When asked about the meaning of these new attacks for the diplomatic effort and the role of the bombing, Rusk replied as follows:

MR. SPIVAK. Secretary Rusk, may I ask you a question?

SECRETARY RUSK. Yes.

MR. SPIVAK. The President the other day asked this question, he said, what would the North Vietnamese be doing if we stopped the bombing and let them alone? Now there is some confusion about what we want them to do. What is it we want them to do today if we stop the bombing?

SECRETARY RUSK. Well, many, many months ago the President said almost anything as a step toward peace. Now I think it is important to understand the political significance of the events of the last 3 or 4 days in South Vietnam. President Johnson said some weeks ago that we are exploring the difference between the statement of their Foreign Minister about entering into discussions and his own San Antonio formula.

Now we have been in the process of exploring the problems that arise when you put those two statements side by side. Hanoi knows that. They know that these explorations are going on because they were a party to them. Secondly, we have exercised some restraint in our bombing in North Vietnam during this period of exploration, particularly in the immediate vicinity of Hanoi and Haiphong. Again, Hanoi knows this. They also knew that the Tet cease-fire period was coming up.

MR. SPIVAK. Have we stopped the bombing there?

SECRETARY RUSK. No, we have not had a pause in the traditionally accepted sense but we have limited the bombing at certain points in order to make it somewhat easier to carry forward these explorations so that particularly difficult incidents would not interrupt them. We have not gone into a pause as that word is generally understood.

But they've also known that the Tet cease-fire was coming up. And they've known from earlier years that we've been interested in converting something like a Tet cease-fire into a more productive dialogue, into some opportunity to move toward peace.

Now in the face of all these elements they participated in laying on this major offensive. Now I think it would be foolish not to draw a political conclusion from this that they are not seriously interested at the present time in talking about peaceful settlement. Or in exploring the problems connected with the San Antonio formula. I remind those who don't recall that formula that it was that we would stop the bombing when it would lead promptly to productive discussions. And we assumed that they would not take advantage of this cessation of bombing while such discussions were going on.

Now it's hard to imagine a more reasonable proposal by any nation involved in an armed conflict than that. And I think we have to assume that these recent offensives in the south are an answer, are an answer, in addition to their public denunciation of the San Antonio formula.

MR. ABEL. Are you saying, Mr. Secretary, that we interpret this offensive as their rejection of the diplomatic overtures that have been made?

SECRETARY RUSK. Well, they have rejected the San Antonio formula publicly, simply on the political level. And I think it would be foolish for us not to take into account what they're doing on the ground when we try to analyze what their political position is. You remember the old saying that what you do speaks so loud I can't hear what you say. Now we can't be indifferent to these actions on the ground and think that these have no consequences from a political point of view. So they know where we live. Everything that we've said, our 14 points, 28 proposals to which we've said yes and to which they've

said no, the San Antonio formula, all these things remain there on the table for anyone who is interested in moving toward peace. They're all there. But they know where we live and we'd be glad to hear from them sometime at their convenience when they decide that they want to move toward peace.

MR. ABEL. I'm assuming, sir, that the San Antonio formula stands as our longer term position here.

SECRETARY RUSK. That is correct. 12/

These views of the Secretary of State were reinforced on February 8 when the North Vietnamese, obviously in the flush of their psychological victory, again broadcast a repudiation of the San Antonio formula. Meanwhile, they had been engaged in secret contacts with the U.S. through the Italian Foreign Office in Rome. On February 14, the Italians disclosed that two representatives from Hanoi had visited Rome on February 4 to meet Foreign Minister Fanfani "for talks about the Vietnam conflict and about possible hypotheses of a start of negotiations to settle it." 13/ Washington was fully informed, yet Rusk announced on the same day that all U.S. attempts to launch peace talks "have resulted in rejection" by Hanoi and that there was no indication she would restrain herself in exchange for a bombing halt. To this the President, at an unscheduled news conference two days later, added that Hanoi was no more ready to negotiate at that time than it had been three years previously. 14/ These reciprocating recriminations in the two capitals were the logical outcome of such dramatic events as the Tet offensive. They would, however, soon give way to cooler evaluations of the situation, presumably on both sides.

The primary focus of the U.S. reaction to the Tet offensive was not diplomatic, however. It was another reexamination of force requirements for avoiding defeat or disaster in the South. On February 9, McNamara asked the Chiefs to provide him with their views on what forces General Westmoreland would require for emergency augmentation and where they should come from. The Chiefs replied on February 12 to the startling effect that while the needs in South Vietnam were pressing, indeed perhaps urgent, any further reduction in the strategic reserve in the U.S. would seriously compromise the U.S. force posture worldwide and could not be afforded. They reluctantly recommended deferring the requests of General Westmoreland for an emergency augmentation. 15/ Rather, they proposed a callup of reserves to meet both the requirements of Vietnam augmentation in the intermediate future and to bring drawn-down forces in the strategic reserve up to strength. The tactic the Chiefs were using was clear: by refusing to scrape the bottom of the barrel any further for Vietnam they hoped to force the President to "bite the bullet" on the callup of the reserves -- a step they had long thought essential, and that they were determined would not now be avoided. Their views notwithstanding, the Secretary the next day ordered an emergency force of

10,500 to Vietnam immediately to reconstitute COMUSMACV's strategic reserve and put out the fire. 16/

With the decision to dispatch, among others, the remainder of the 82d Airborne Division as emergency augmentation and its public announcement, the policy process slowed down appreciably for the following ten days. The troops were loaded aboard the aircraft for the flight to Vietnam on February 14 and the President flew to Ft. Bragg to personally say farewell to them. The experience proved for him to be one of the most profoundly moving and troubling of the entire Vietnam war. The men, many of whom had only recently returned from Vietnam, were grim. They were not young men going off to adventure but seasoned veterans returning to an ugly conflict from which they knew some would not return. The film clips of the President shaking hands with the solemn but determined paratroopers on the ramps of their aircraft revealed a deeply troubled leader. He was confronting the men he was asking to make the sacrifice and they displayed no enthusiasm. It may well be that the dramatic decisions of the succeeding month and a half that reversed the direction of American policy in the war had their genesis in those troubled handshakes.

B. The "A to Z" Review

1. The Reassessment Begins

For roughly ten days, things were quiet in Washington. In Vietnam, the battle for the recapture of the Citadel in Hue raged on until the 24th of February before the last North Vietnamese defenders were overrun. As conditions in South Vietnam sorted themselves out and some semblance of normality returned to the command organizations, MACV began a comprehensive reassessment of his requirements. Aware that this review was going on and that it would result in requests for further troop augmentation, the President sent General Wheeler, the Chairman of the JCS to Saigon on February 23 to consult with General Westmoreland and report back on the new situation and its implication for further forces. Wheeler returned from Vietnam on the 25th and filed his report on the 27th. The substance of his and General Westmoreland's recommendations had preceded him to Washington, however, and greatly troubled the President. The military were requesting a major reinforcement of more than 3 divisions and supporting forces totalling in excess of 200,000 men, and were asking for a callup of some 280,000 reservists to fill these requirements and flesh out the strategic reserve and training base at home. 17/ The issue was thus squarely joined. To accept the military recommendations would entail not only a full-scale callup of reserves, but also putting the country economically on a semi-war footing, all at a time of great domestic dissent, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment about both the purposes and the conduct of the war. The President was understandably reluctant to take such action, the more so in an election year.

The assessments of North Vietnamese intention, moreover, were not reassuring. The CIA, evaluating a captured document, circulated a report on the same day as General Wheeler's report that stated:

Hanoi's confident assessment of the strength of its position clearly is central to its strategic thinking. Just as it provided the rationale for the Communists' 'winter-spring campaign,' it probably will also govern the North Vietnamese response to the present tactical situation. If Hanoi believes it is operating from a position of strength, as this analysis suggests, it can be expected to press its military offensive--even at the cost of serious setbacks. Given their view of the strategic balance, it seems doubtful that the Communists would be inclined to settle for limited military gains intended merely to improve their bargaining position in negotiations. 18/

The alternatives for the President, therefore, did not seem very attractive. With such a major decision to make he asked his incoming Secretary of Defense, Clark Clifford, to convene a senior group of advisors from State, Defense, CIA, and the White House and to conduct a complete review of our involvement, re-evaluating both the range of aims and the spectrum of means to achieve them. The review was soon tagged the "A to Z Policy Review" or the "Clifford Group Review." 19/

2. The Clifford Group

The first meeting of the Clifford Group was convened in the Secretary's office at the Pentagon on Wednesday, February 28. Present were McNamara, General Taylor, Nitze, Fowler, Katzenbach, Walt Rostow, Helms, Warnke, and Phil Habib from Bundy's office. 20/ In the meeting, Clifford outlined the task as he had received it from the President and a general discussion ensued from which assignments were made on the preparation of studies and papers. The focus of the entire effort was the deployment requests from MACV. The general subjects assigned were recapitulated the following day by Bundy:

OUTLINE FOR SUBJECTS AND DIVISION OF LABOR ON VIET NAM STAFF STUDY

Subjects to be Considered

1. What alternative courses of action are available to the US?

Assignment: Defense - General Taylor - State - (Secretary)

2. What alternative courses are open to the enemy?

Assignment: Defense and CIA

3. Analysis of implications of Westmoreland's request for additional troops.

Series of papers on the following:

Military implications - JCS

Political implications - State

(Political implications in their broadest domestic and international sense to include internal Vietnamese problem)

Budgetary results - Defense

Economic implications - Treasury

Congressional implications - Defense

Implications for public opinion - domestic and international - State.

4. Negotiation Alternatives

Assignment: State 21/

The papers were to be considered at a meeting to be held at Defense on Saturday, March 2 at 10:00 A.M. In fact, the meeting was later deferred until Sunday afternoon and the whole effort of the Task Force shifted to the drafting of a single Memorandum for the President with a recommended course of action and supporting papers. The work became so intensive that it was carried out in teams within ISA, one operating as a drafting committee and another (Mr. Warnke - ASD/ISA, Dr. Enthoven - ASD/SA, Dr. Halperin - DASD/ISA/PP, Mr. Steadman - DASD/EA & PR) as a kind of policy review board. Of the work done outside the Pentagon only the paper on negotiations prepared by Bundy at State and General Taylor's paper went to the White House. The other materials contributed by the CIA and State were fed into the deliberative process going on at the Pentagon but did not figure directly in the final memo. It would be misleading, however, not to note that the drafting group working within ISA included staff members from both the State Department and the White House, so that the final memo did represent an interagency effort. Nevertheless, the dominant voice in the consideration of alternatives as the working group progressed through three different drafts before the Sunday meeting was that of OSD. To provide some sense of the ideas being debated with respect to the air war and negotiations, relevant sections of a number of papers written during

those frantic days of late February, early March are included below, even though most of them never reached the President.

The CIA, responding to the requirements of the Clifford Group for an assessment of the current communist position and the alternatives open to them, sent several memos to the drafting committee before the Sunday meeting. On February 29, they argued that the VC/NVA could be expected to continue the harassment of the urban areas for the next several months in the hope of exacting a sufficient price from the U.S. and the GVN to force us to settle the war on their terms. But, no serious negotiation initiative was anticipated until the conclusion of the military phase:

4. Political Options. Until the military campaign has run its course and the results are fairly clear, it is unlikely that Hanoi will be seriously disposed to consider negotiations with the U.S. A negotiating ploy is possible, however, at almost any point in the present military campaign. It would be intentionally designed to be difficult for the US to reject. The purpose, however, would not be a serious intent to settle the war, but rather to cause new anxieties in Saigon, which might cause a crisis and lead to the collapse of the Thieu-Ky government.

5. As of now Hanoi probably foresees two alternative sets of circumstances in which a serious move to negotiate a settlement might be entertained:

a. Obviously, if the military campaign is producing significant successes and the GVN is in serious disarray at some point Hanoi would probably give the US the opportunity to end the war. This might take the form of offering a general cease-fire followed by negotiations on terms which would amount to registering a complete Communist political success.

b. If, on the other hand, the military campaign does not go well and the results are inconclusive, then Hanoi would probably change its military strategy to continue the struggle on a reduced level. 22/

To this assessment was added a somewhat more detailed estimate the following day addressed to several specific questions. Expanding on their memo of the previous day in response to a question about whether the North Vietnamese had abandoned the "protracted conflict" concept, the Agency concluded:

In our view the intensity of the Tet offensive and the exertions being made to sustain pressures confirms that Hanoi is now engaged in a major effort to achieve early and decisive results. Yet the Communists probably have no rigid timetable. They apparently have high hopes of achieving their objectives this year, but they will preserve considerable tactical flexibility. 23/

Again in more detail, they responded to a question about negotiations, a bombing suspension and terms of settlement:

What is the Communist attitude toward negotiations: in particular how would Hanoi deal with an unconditional cessation of US bombing of NVN and what would be its terms for a settlement?

8. The Communists probably still expect the war to end eventually in some form of negotiations. Since they hope the present military effort will be decisive in destroying the GVN and ARVN, they are not likely to give any serious consideration to negotiations until this campaign has progressed far enough for its results to be fairly clear.

9. If, however, the US ceased the bombing of North Vietnam in the near future, Hanoi would probably respond more or less as indicated in its most recent statements. It would begin talks fairly soon, would accept a fairly wide ranging exploration of issues, but would not moderate its terms for a final settlement or stop fighting in the South.

10. In any talks, Communist terms would involve the establishment of a new "coalition" government, which would in fact if not in appearance be under the domination of the Communists. Secondly, they would insist on a guaranteed withdrawal of US forces within some precisely defined period. Their attitude toward other issues would be dictated by the degree of progress in achieving these two primary objectives, and the military-political situation then obtaining in South Vietnam.

11. Cessation of bombing and opening of negotiations without significant Communist concessions would be deeply disturbing to the Saigon government. There would be a real risk that the Thieu-Ky regime would collapse, and this would in fact be part of Hanoi's calculation in accepting negotiations. 24/

On March 2, the CIA made one additional input to the deliberations, this time on the question of Soviet and Chinese aid to North Vietnam. The intelligence offered was based on the report of a high-level defector and concluded with a disturbing estimate of how the Soviets would react to the closing of Haiphong harbor. In summary this is what the CIA expected in the way of international communist aid to Hanoi:

International Communist Aid to North Vietnam

Summary

The USSR continues to provide the overwhelming share of the increasing amounts of military aid being provided to North Vietnam and is willing to sustain this commitment at present or even higher levels. A recent high-level defector indicates that aid deliveries will increase even further in 1968. He also makes it clear that there is no quantitative limit to the types of the assistance that the USSR would provide with the possible exception of offensive weapons that would result in a confrontation with the U.S. He also reports that the USSR cannot afford to provide aid if it wishes to maintain its position in the socialist camp.

This source does not believe that the recent increase in aid deliveries reflects an awareness on the part of European Communist power that the Tet offensive was imminent.

The defector confirms intelligence estimates that the USSR has not been able to use its aid programs as a means of influencing North Vietnam's conduct of the war. In his opinion the Chinese are a more influential power.

Finally, the defector reports that the USSR will use force to maintain access to the port of Haiphong. The evidence offered to support this statement conflicts sharply with the present judgment of the intelligence community and is undergoing extremely close scrutiny. 25/

Bundy's office at State furnished a copious set of papers dealing with many aspects of the situation that are covered in greater detail in Task Force Paper IV.C.6. For our purposes I will consider only some of the judgments offered about Soviet, Chinese and other reactions to various courses of action against North Vietnam. The basic alternatives which were the basis of the appraisals of likely foreign reaction were drafted by Bundy and approved by Katzenbach as follows:

Option A

This would basically consist of accepting the Wheeler-Westmoreland recommendation aimed at sending roughly 100,000 men by 1 May, and another 100,000 men by the end of 1968.

This course of action is assumed to mean no basic change in strategy with respect to areas and places we attempt to hold. At the same time, the option could include some shift in the distribution of our increased forces, in the direction of city and countryside security and to some extent away from "search and destroy" operations away from populated areas.

The option basically would involve full presentation to the Congress of the total Wheeler-Westmoreland package, with all its implications for the reserves, tax increases, and related actions.

At the same time, there are sub-options with respect to the negotiating posture we adopt if we present such a total package. These sub-options appear to be as follows:

Option A-1: Standing pat on the San Antonio formula and on our basic position of what would be acceptable in a negotiated settlement.

Option A-2: Accompanying our presenting the announcement with a new "peace offensive" modifying the San Antonio formula or our position on a negotiated settlement, or both.

Option A-3: Making no present change in our negotiating posture, but making a strong noise that our objective is to create a situation from which we can in fact move into negotiations within the next 4 - 8 months if the situation can be righted.

Option B

The essence of this option would be a change in our military strategy, involving a reduction in the areas and places we sought to control. It might involve withdrawal from the western areas of I Corps and from the highland areas, for example. The objective would be to concentrate our forces, at whatever level, far more heavily on the protection of populated areas. Again, there are sub-options, roughly as follows:

Option B-1: Such a change in strategy, with no increase or minimal increase in forces.

Option B-2: Such a change in strategy accompanied by a substantial increase in forces, although possibly less than the totals indicated in the Wheeler-Westmoreland proposals.

Option C:

This might be called the "air power" or "greater emphasis on the North" option. It would appear to fit most readily with an Option B course of action in the South, but would mean that we would extend our bombing and other military actions against the North to try to strangle the war there and put greater pressure on Hanoi in this area. 26/

Three other options were also offered but carried no specific proposals for the air war or the negotiations track.

These generalized options took on more specific form when Bundy examined possible Soviet and Chinese reactions. Among the possible U.S. actions against North Vietnam, he evaluated mining the harbors, all-out bombing of the North, and invasion. These were the Soviet responses he anticipated:

3. Mining or Blockade of DRV Ports. This is a prospect the Soviets have dreaded. Mining, in particular, is a tough problem for them because it would not readily permit them to play on our own worries about escalation. They could attempt to sweep the mines which we would then presumably resow. They could somehow help the DRV in attacking US aircraft and ships engaged in the mining operation, even if this was occurring outside territorial waters, but such operations, apart from risking fire-fights with the US, do not seem very promising. Blockade, on the other hand, confronts the Soviets with the choice of trying to run it. They might decide to try it in the hope that we would stand aside. They would almost certainly authorize their ship captains to resist US inspection, capture or orders to turn around. What happens next again gets us into the essentially unknowable. In any case, however, it is unlikely that the Soviets would attempt naval or DRV-based air escorts for their ships. Naval escort would of course require the dispatch of vessels from Soviet home ports. On balance, but not very confidently, I would conclude that in the end the Soviets would turn their ships around, a highly repulsive possibility for

Moscow. Presumably, in such an event, they would seek to increase shipments via China, if China lets them. (Purely in terms of the military impact on the DRV, it should be understood that the bulk of Soviet military hardware goes to the DRV by rail and a blockade would therefore not in and of itself impede the flow of Soviet arms).

4. All-out US Bombing of the DRV. This one poses tougher problems for the Soviets and hence for any assessment of what they would do. Moscow has in the past shown some sensitivity to the consequences of such a US course. If the US program resulted in substantial damage to the DRV air defense system (SAMS, MIGs, AAA, radars, etc.) the Soviets will seek to replenish it as rapidly as possible via China and, assuming the Chinese will let them, i.e. permit trains to pass and planes to overfly and land en route. Soviet personnel can be expected to participate in the DRV air defense in an advisory capacity and in ground operations and the Soviets will presumably keep quiet about any casualties they might suffer in the process. It is likely, however, that this kind of Soviet involvement would increase up to and including, in the extreme, the overt dispatch, upon DRV request, of volunteers. (Moscow has long said it would do so and it is difficult to see how it could avoid delivering on its promise.) Such volunteers might actually fly DRV aircraft if enough DRV pilots had meanwhile been lost. Needless to say, once this stage is reached assessments become less confident, if only because the US Administration itself will have to consider just how far it wants to go in engaging the Soviets in an air battle in Vietnam. The Soviets for their part are not well situated to conduct a major air defense battle in Vietnam and there is the further question whether the Chinese would be prepared to grant them bases for staging equipment and personnel or for sanctuary. (On past form this seems unlikely, but this might change if the US air offensive produced decisive effects on the DRV's capacity to continue the war, in itself a dubious result.)

5. Invasion of the Southern DRV. In this case, the Soviets would continue and, if needed, step up their hardware assistance to the DRV. If the fighting remained confined to the Southern part of the DRV and did not threaten the viability of the DRV regime, there would probably not be additional Soviet action, though conceivably some Soviet personnel might show up in advisory capacities, especially

if new and sophisticated Soviet equipment were being supplied. If the invasion became a general assault on the DRV, an overt DRV call for volunteers might ensue and be acted on. At this point of course the Chinese would enter into the picture too and we are in a complex new contingency. In general, it is hard to visualize large numbers of Chinese and Soviet forces (transported through China) fighting side by side against us in Vietnam and I would assume that what we would have would be largely a US landwar against the DRV-China.

6. Matters would become even stickier if the US offensive led to repeated damage to Soviet ships in DRV ports. (There are roughly eleven Soviet ships in these ports on any one day). The Soviets might arm their vessels and authorize them to fire at US planes. Once again, when this point has been reached we are in a new contingency, although the basic fact holds that the Soviets are not well situated, geographically and logistically, for effective military counter-action in the DRV itself. 27/

China's expected reactions to these three possible courses of action were quite different in view of the lower level of its economic and military support, the existence of ample land LOCs to China, etc. Here is how Bundy foresaw Chinese responses:

3. Mining and/or Blockading of Haiphong

China would probably not regard the loss of Haiphong port facilities as critically dangerous to the war effort since it could continue to supply North Vietnam by rail and road and by small ships and lighters. In addition, Peking might seek to replace Haiphong as a deep sea port, by expanding operations (Chanchiang, Ft. Bayard), which is already serving as an unloading point for goods destined for shipment by rail to North Vietnam. China would be all means make sure that the flow of both Soviet and Chinese material for North Vietnam--by land and by sea--continued uninterrupted and might welcome the additional influence it would gain as the remaining main link in North Vietnam's life line. It also would probably put at North Vietnam's disposal as many shallow draft vessels as it could possibly spare, and assist Hanoi in developing alternate maritime off-loading facilities and inland waterway routes. At the same time, the Chinese would probably be ready to assist in improving North Vietnamese coastal defenses, and might provide additional patrol boats, possibly including guided missile vessels.

4. All-Out Conventional Bombing of North Vietnam,
Including Hanoi and Haiphong

China would probably be prepared to provide as much logistical support and labor as the North Vietnamese might need to keep society functioning in North Vietnam and to help Hanoi maintain the war effort in the South. Peking would probably be ready to increase its anti-aircraft artillery contingent in the South, (possibly sending SAM batteries), and would probably supply the North Vietnamese air force with MIG-19's from its own inventory. Chinese airspace and airfields would be made available, as and when necessary, as a refuge for North Vietnamese aircraft. There is a strong possibility that Chinese pilots in MIG's with North Vietnamese markings would engage US bombers over North Vietnam. However, we would anticipate overt Chinese intervention only if the scope of the bombing seemed intended to destroy North Vietnam as a viable Communist state.

5. US Invasion of North Vietnam

Chinese reaction would depend on the scale of US moves, on North Vietnamese intentions and on Peking's view of US objectives. If it became evident that we were not aiming for a rapid takeover of North Vietnam but intended chiefly to hold some territory in southern areas to inhibit Hanoi's actions in South Vietnam and to force it to quit fighting, we would expect China to attempt to deter us from further northward movement and to play on our fears of a Sino-US conflict, but not to intervene massively in the war. Thus, if requested by Hanoi, Peking would probably be willing to station infantry north of Hanoi, to attach some ground forces to North Vietnamese units further south, and to contribute to any "volunteer" contingent that North Vietnam might organize. At home, China would probably complement these deterrents by various moves ostensibly putting the country on a war footing.

If the North Vietnamese, under threat of a full-scale invasion, decided to agree to a negotiated settlement, the Chinese would probably go along. On the other hand, if the Chinese believed that the US was intent on destroying the North Vietnamese regime (either because Hanoi insisted on holding out to the end, or because Peking chronically expects the worst from the US), they would probably fear for their own security and intervene on a massive scale. 28/

Probably more influential than these State Department Views on international communist reactions was a cable from Ambassador Thompson in Moscow offering his personal assessment of the Soviet mood and what we might expect from various US decisions. The cable was addressed to Under Secretary Katzenbach, but there is little doubt it made its way to the White House in view of Thompson's prestige and the importance of his post. For these reasons it is included here in its entirety.

General Maxwell Taylor, like Bundy, sought to place the alternatives available to the U.S. into some sort of framework and to package the specific actions and responses to the situation the U.S. might take so as to create several viable options for consideration by the group. The memo he drafted on alternatives was more important finally than the one done by Bundy since Taylor sent a copy of it directly to the President in his capacity as Special Military Advisor, as well as giving it to the Clifford Group. With his background as a military man, past Chairman of the JCS, and former Ambassador to Saigon, Taylor's views carry special weight in any deliberation. His memo was sent to the White House even before the DPM the Clifford Group was working on and is therefore included in part here. Taylor wisely began by reconsidering the objectives of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, both past and potential. They were, as he saw it, four:

Alternative Objectives of U.S. Policy in South Viet-Nam

2. The overall policy alternatives open to the U.S. have always been and continue to be four in number. The first is the continued pursuit of our present objective which has been defined in slightly different terms but always in essentially the same sense by our political leaders. For the purpose of this paper, I am taking the statement of President Johnson in his speech at Johns Hopkins University in April, 1965: "Our objective is the independence of South Viet-Nam and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves, only that the people of South Viet-Nam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way."

3. We have sometimes confused the situation by suggesting that this is not really our objective, that we have other things in mind such as the defeat of the "War of Liberation" technique, the containment of Red China, and a further application of the Truman Doctrine to the resistance of aggression. However, it is entirely possible to have one or more of these collateral objectives at the same time since they will be side effects of the attainment of the basic objective cited above.

4. Of the other three possible objectives, one is above and two are below the norm established by the present one. We can increase our present objective to total military victory, unconditional surrender, and the destruction of the Communist Government in North Viet-Nam. Alternatively, we can lower our objective to a compromise resulting in something less than an independent Viet-Nam free from attack or we can drop back further and content ourselves with punishing the aggressor to the point that we can withdraw, feeling that the "War of Liberation" technique has at least been somewhat discredited as a cheap method of Communist expansion.

5. We should consider changing the objective which we have been pursuing consistently since 1954 only for the most cogent reasons. There is clearly nothing to recommend trying to do more than what we are now doing at such great cost. To undertake to do less is to accept needlessly a serious defeat for which we would pay dearly in terms of our world-wide position of leadership, of the political stability of Southeast Asia, and of the credibility of our pledges to friends and allies.

6. In summary, our alternatives are to stay with our present objective (stick it out), to raise our objective (all out), to scale down our objective (pull back), or to abandon our objective (pull out). Since there is no serious consideration being given at the moment to adding to or subtracting from the present objective, the discussion in this paper is limited to considerations of alternative strategies and programs to attain the present objective: 29/

With this review of the possible objectives and his own statement of preference, Taylor turned to the possible responses to General Westmoreland's troop request and the ramifications of each. Here he devoted himself more to trying to develop the multiplicity of considerations that needed to be weighed in each instance than to passionate advocacy of one or another course. At the end of his memo he considered the political implications of various options with special attention to the problem of negotiations with Hanoi -- a subject with which he had long been preoccupied. He concluded by packaging the various military, political and diplomatic courses of action into three alternative programs. Here is how he reasoned:

b. As the purpose of our military operations is to bring security to South Viet-Nam behind which the GVN can restore order and normalcy of life and, at the same time, to convince Hanoi of the impossibility of realizing its goal of a Communist-controlled government imposed upon South Viet-Nam, we have to consider the political effect of our military actions both on Saigon and on Hanoi. With regard to Saigon, a refusal to reinforce at this time will bring discouragement and renewed suspicion of U.S. intentions; in Hanoi, an opposite effect. On the other hand, a large reinforcement may lessen the sense of urgency animating the Vietnamese Government and result in a decrease of effort; in Hanoi, it may cause them to undertake further escalation.

c. Our decision on reinforcement inevitably will raise the question of how to relate this action to possible negotiations. Anything we say or do with regard to negotiations causes the sharpest scrutiny of our motives on the part of our Vietnamese allies and we should be very careful at this time that we do not give them added grounds for suspicion. If it appears desirable for us to make a new negotiation overture in connection with reinforcement, it will need careful preliminary discussion with the GVN authorities.

d. The following political actions are worth considering in connection with our decision on reinforcement:

(1) A renewed offer of negotiation, possibly with a private communication that we would suspend the bombing for a fixed period without making the time limitation public if we were assured that productive negotiations would start before the end of the period.

(2) A public announcement that we would adjust the bombing of the North to the level of intensity of enemy ground action in the South.

(3) As a prelude to sharply increased bombing levels, possibly to include the closing of Haiphong, a statement of our intentions made necessary by the enemy offensive against the cities and across the frontiers.

(4) Announcement of the withdrawal of the San Antonio formula in view of the heightened level of aggression conducted by North Viet-Nam.

(5) Keep silent.

The foregoing is merely a tabulation of possible political actions to consider in choosing the military alternative. In the end, military and political actions should be blended together into an integrated package.

e. The choice among these political alternatives will depend largely on our decision with regard to reinforcements for General Westmoreland. However, the present military situation in South Viet-Nam argues strongly against a new negotiation effort (d. (1)) and any thought of reducing the bombing of the North. If we decide to meet General Westmoreland's request, we could underline the significance of our action by d. (3). In any case, we would appear well-advised to withdraw from the San Antonio formula (d. (4)).

13. From the foregoing considerations, there appear to be at least three program packages worth serious consideration. They follow:

Package A

a. No increase of General Westmoreland's forces in South Viet-Nam.

b. New strategic guidance.

c. Build-up of Strategic Reserve.

d. No negotiation initiative.

e. Withdrawal of San Antonio formula.

f. Pressure on GVN to do better.

Package B

a. Partial acceptance of General Westmoreland's recommendation.

b. New strategic guidance.

c. Build-up of Strategic Reserve.

d. No negotiation initiative.

e. Withdrawal of San Antonio formula.

f. Pressure on GVN to do better.

Package C

a. Approval of General Westmoreland's full request.

b. New strategic guidance.

c. Build-up of Strategic Reserve.

d. No negotiation initiative.

e. Withdrawal of San Antonio formula and announcement of intention to close Haiphong.

f. Pressure on GVN to do better.

g. Major effort to rally the homefront.

M. D. T. 30/

While these papers were all being written outside the Pentagon, the Clifford working group under the direction of Assistant Secretary Warnke had worked feverishly on several succeeding drafts of a Memorandum for the President including various combinations of tabs and supporting material. The intent of the group was to produce a memo that made a specific recommendation on a course of action rather than presenting a number of alternatives with their pros and cons. The process required the reconciling of widely divergent views or the exclusion of those that were incompatible with the thrust of the recommendation. With respect to the war in the South the memo in its late-stage form on March 3 proposed a sweeping change in U.S. ground strategy based on a decision not to substantially increase U.S. forces as General Westmoreland and the Chiefs desired. In essence, the draft memo recommended the adoption of a strategy of population protection along a "demographic frontier" in South Vietnam and the abandonment of General Westmoreland's hitherto-sacrosanct large unit "search and destroy" operations. The portion of the paper devoted to the air war recommended no escalation above current levels. It specifically turned back proposals for reducing the Hanoi-Haiphong restricted perimeters, closing Haiphong harbor, and bombing population centers as all likely to be unproductive or worse. The section in question argued as follows:

SIGNIFICANCE OF BOMBING CAMPAIGN IN NORTH TO OUR
OBJECTIVES IN VIETNAM

The bombing of North Vietnam was undertaken to limit and/or make more difficult the infiltration of men and supplies in the South, to show them they would have to pay a price for their continued aggression and to raise the morale in South Vietnam. The last two purposes obviously have been achieved.

It has become abundantly clear that no level of bombing can prevent the North Vietnamese from supplying the necessary forces and materiel necessary to maintain their military operations in the South. The recent Tet offensive has shown that the bombing cannot even prevent a significant increase in these military operations, at least on an intermittent basis.

The shrinking of the circles around Hanoi and Haiphong will add to North Vietnam's costs and difficulty

in supplying the NVA/VC forces. It will not destroy their capability to support their present level of military activity. Greater concentration on the infiltration routes in Laos and in the area immediately North of the DMZ might prove effective from the standpoint of interdiction.

Strikes within 10 miles of the center of Hanoi and within four miles of the center of Haiphong have required initial approval from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretaries of State and Defense, and, finally, the President. This requirement has enabled the highest level of government to maintain some control over the attacks against targets located in the populous and most politically sensitive areas of North Vietnam. Other than the Haiphong Port, no single target within these areas has any appreciable significance for North Vietnam's ability to supply men and material to the South. If these areas of control were reduced to circles having a radii of 3 miles from the center of Hanoi and 1-1/2 miles of the center of Haiphong, some minor fixed targets not previously authorized would be released for strike. More significant is the fact that the lines of communication lying within the area previously requiring Washington approval would be open for attack by shrinking the control areas around Hanoi and Haiphong. The question would simply be whether it is worth the increase in airplane and pilot losses to attack these lines of communication in the most heavily defended part of North Vietnam where our airplane loss ratio is highest.

The remaining issue on interdiction of supplies has to do with the closing of the Port of Haiphong. Although this is the route by which some 80% of North Vietnamese imports come into the country, it is not the point of entry for most of the military supplies and ammunition. These materials predominantly enter via the rail routes from China.

Moreover, if the Port of Haiphong were to be closed effectively, the supplies that now enter Haiphong could, albeit with considerable difficulty, arrive either over the land routes or by lighterage, which has been so successful in the continued POL supply. Under these circumstances, the closing of Haiphong Port would not prevent the continued supply of sufficient materials to maintain North Vietnamese military operations in the South.

Accordingly, the only purpose of intensification of the bombing campaign in the North and the addition of further targets would be to endeavor to break the will of the North Vietnamese leaders. CFA forecasts indicate little if any chance that this would result even from a protracted bombing campaign directed at population centers.

A change in our bombing policy to include deliberate strikes on population centers and attacks on the agricultural population through the destruction of dikes would further alienate domestic and foreign sentiment and might well lose us the support of those European countries which now support our effort in Vietnam. It could cost us Australian and New Zealand participation in the fighting.

Although the North Vietnamese do not mark the camps where American prisoners are kept or reveal their locations, we know from intelligence sources that most of these facilities are located in or near Hanoi. Our intelligence also indicates that many more than the approximately 200 pilots officially classified by us as prisoners of war may, in fact, be held by North Vietnam in these camps. On the basis of the debriefing of the three pilots recently released by Hanoi, we were able to identify over 40 additional American prisoners despite the fact that they were kept in relative isolation. Heavy and indiscriminate attacks in the Hanoi area would jeopardize the lives of these prisoners and alarm their wives and parents into vocal opposition. Reprisals could be taken against them and the idea of war crimes trials would find considerable acceptance in countries outside the Communist bloc.

Finally, the steady and accelerating bombing of the North has not brought North Vietnam closer to any real move toward peace. Apprehensions about bombing attacks that would destroy Hanoi and Haiphong may at some time help move them toward productive negotiations. Actual destruction of these areas would eliminate a threat that could influence them to seek a political settlement on terms acceptable to us. 31/

The Clifford Group principals convened on the afternoon of Sunday, March 3, to consider this draft memo. Mr. Warnke read the memo, completed only shortly before the meeting, to the assembled group. The ensuing discussion apparently produced a consensus that abandoning the initiative completely as the draft memo seemed to imply could leave allied forces and the South Vietnamese cities themselves more, not less, vulnerable. With respect to the bombing, opinion was sharply divided. General Wheeler advocated the reduction of the restricted zones around Hanoi and Haiphong and an expansion of naval activity against North Vietnam. The Chiefs had apparently abandoned for the moment efforts to secure authority for mining the approaches to the ports, although this alternative was considered in the State drafts. ISA on the other hand sharply opposed any expansion of the air war but particularly in Route Packages 6A and 6B which a recent Systems Analysis study had shown to be especially unproductive as an anti-infiltration measure. 32/ As for negotiations, all were agreed that not much could be expected in the near future from Hanoi and that there was no reason to modify the current U.S. position. The conclusion of the long meeting was to request Warnke's working group to write an entirely new draft memo for the President that: (a) dealt only with the troop numbers issue, recommending only a modest increase; (b) called for more emphasis on the RVNAF contribution to the war effort; (c) called for a study of possible new strategic guidance; (d) recommended against any new initiative on negotiations; and (e) acknowledged the split in opinion about bombing policy by including papers from both sides. Thus, after five days of exhausting work, the working group started over again and produced a completely fresh draft for the following day.

3. The March 4 DPM

The new DPM was completed on Monday and circulated for comment but later transmitted to the President without change by Secretary Clifford. In its final form this DPM represented the recommendations of the Clifford Group. The main proposals of the memo were those mentioned above. The specific language of the cover memo with respect to bombing and negotiations was the following:

5. No new peace initiative on Vietnam. Re-statement of our terms for peace and certain limited diplomatic actions to dramatize Laos and to focus attention on the total threat to Southeast Asia. Details in Tab E.

6. A general decision on bombing policy, not excluding future change, but adequate to form a basis for discussion with the Congress on this key aspect. Here your advisers are divided:

a. General Wheeler and others would advocate a substantial extension of targets and authority in and near Hanoi and Haiphong, mining of Haiphong, and naval gunfire up to a Chinese Buffer Zone;

b. Others would advocate a seasonal step-up through the spring, but without these added elements. 33/

The two detailed tabs to the memo of special interest to this study were "E" and "F" dealing with negotiations and bombing respectively. The negotiations paper was written by Bundy and was a lengthy argument for doing nothing we had not already done. Its central message was contained in a few paragraphs near the middle of the paper:

As to our conditions for stopping the bombing and entering into talks, we continue to believe that the San Antonio formula is "rock bottom." The South Vietnamese are in fact talking about much stiffer conditions, such as stopping the infiltration entirely. Any move by us to modify the San Antonio formula downward would be extremely disturbing in South Vietnam, and would have no significant offsetting gains in US public opinion or in key third countries. On the contrary, we should continue to take the line that the San Antonio formula laid out conditions under which there was a reasonable prospect that talks would get somewhere and be conducted in good faith. Hanoi's major offensive has injected a new factor, in which we are bound to conclude that there is no such prospect for the present.

Moreover, we should at the appropriate time -- probably not in a major statement, but rather in response to a question -- make the point that "normal" infiltration of men and equipment from the North cannot mean the much increased levels that have prevailed since October. We do not need to define exactly what we would mean by "normal" but we should make clear that we do not mean the levels since San Antonio was set out.

Apart from this point on our public posture, we should be prepared -- in the unlikely event that Hanoi makes an affirmative noise on the "no advantage" assumption -- go go back at them through some channel and make this same point quite explicit.

In short, our public posture and our private actions should be designed to:

a. Maintain San Antonio and our general public willingness for negotiations.

b. Add this new and justified interpretation of San Antonio so that in fact we would not be put on the spot over the next 2-4 months.

c. Keep sufficient flexibility so that, if the situation should improve, we could move during the summer if we then judged it wise. 54/

This position represented the widely held belief at the time that the question of negotiations, in spite of continuing contacts through third parties, was no less moribund than it had been at any time in the previous year. The San Antonio formula was regarded as eminently reasonable and DRV failure to respond to it was interpreted as evidence of their general disinterest in negotiations at the time. In that context, and in the wake of the ferocious attacks in South Vietnam, new initiatives could only be construed by Hanoi as evidence of allied weakness. Hence, no new offers were recommended.

As already noted, the Clifford Group was split on the issue of bombing policy, therefore, two papers on the subject were included. The first had been written by the Joint Staff and was submitted by General Wheeler. It advocated reduction of the Hanoi/Haiphong perimeters, the extension of naval operations and authority to use sea-based surface-to-air missiles against North Vietnamese MIGs. The cover memo for this tab noted that: "In addition General Wheeler would favor action to close the Port of Haiphong through mining or otherwise. Since this matter has been repeatedly presented to the President, General Wheeler has not added a specific paper on this proposal." 35/ The General had apparently gotten the word that closing the ports just wasn't an action the President was going to consider, even in this "comprehensive" review. The JCS bombing paper began with a discussion of the history of the air war and offered some explanations for its seeming failure to date:

1. The air campaign against North Vietnam is now entering the fourth year of operations. Only during the latter part of the past favorable weather season of April through October 1967, however, has a significant weight of effort been applied against the major target systems. During this period, even though hampered by continuous and temporarily imposed constraints, the air campaign made a marked impact on the capability of North Vietnam to prosecute the war. Unfortunately, this impact was rapidly overcome. The constraints on operations and the change in the monsoon weather provided North Vietnam with numerous opportunities to recuperate from the effects of the air strikes. Facilities were rebuilt and reconstituted and dispersal of the massive material aid from communist countries continued.

2. There is a distinct difference between the North Vietnam that existed in early 1965 and the North Vietnam of today. The difference is a direct result of the material aid received from external sources and the ability to accommodate to limited and sporadic air strikes. The Hanoi regime throughout the air campaign has not shown a change in national will, but outwardly displays a determination to continue the war. The viability of the North Vietnam military posture results from the availability of adequate assets received from communist countries which permits defense of the homeland and support of insurgency in the South. 36/

To make the air campaign effective in its objectives in the months ahead, the Chiefs recommended modification of the existing regulations. The campaign they had in mind and the changes in present policy required for it were as follows:

4. A coordinated and sustained air campaign could hamper severely the North Vietnam war effort and the continued support of aggression throughout Southeast Asia. An integrated interdiction campaign should be undertaken against the road, rail and waterway lines of communication with the objective of isolating the logistics base of Hanoi and Haiphong from each other and from the rest of North Vietnam. To achieve this objective, the following tasks must be performed employing a properly balanced weight of effort:

a. Destroy war supporting facilities as well as those producing items vital to the economy.

b. Attack enemy defenses in order to protect our strike forces, destroy enemy gun crews and weapons, and force the expenditure of munitions.

c. Conduct air attacks throughout as large an area and as continuously as possible in order to destroy lines of communication targets and associated facilities, dispersed material and supplies and to exert maximum suppression of normal activities because of the threat.

d. Attack and destroy railroad rolling stock, vehicles and waterborne logistics craft throughout as large an area as possible, permitting minimum sanctuaries.

5. Targeting criteria for the effective accomplishment of a systematic air campaign would continue to preclude the attack of population as a target, but accept

greater risks of civilian casualties in order to achieve the stated objective. The initial changes in operating authorities necessary to the initiation of an effective air campaign are:

a. Delete the 30/10NM Hanoi Restricted/Prohibited Area and establish a 3NM Hanoi Control Area (Map, TAB).

b. Delete the 10/4NM Haiphong Restricted/Prohibited Area and establish a 1.5NM Haiphong Control Area (Map, TAB).

c. Delete the Special Northeast Coastal Armed Reconnaissance Area. 37/

As explanations of how the removal of these restrictions would achieve the desired results, the Chiefs gave the following arguments:

6. The present Restricted Areas around Hanoi and Haiphong have existed since 1965. The Prohibited Areas were created in December 1966. Numerous strikes, however, have been permitted in these areas over the past two and one-half years, e.g., dispersed POL, SAM and AAA sites, SAM support facilities, armed reconnaissance of selected LOC and attacks of LOC associated targets, and attack of approved fixed targets. The major political requirements for having established control areas in the vicinity of Hanoi and Haiphong are to provide a measure of control of the intensity of effort applied in consonance with the national policy of graduated pressures and to assist in keeping civilian casualties to a minimum consistent with the importance of the target. These requirements can still be satisfied in the control areas are reduced to 3NM and 1.5NM around Hanoi and Haiphong, respectively. These new control areas will contain the population centers, but permit operational commanders the necessary flexibility to attack secondary, as well as primary, lines of communication to preclude NVN from accommodating to the interdiction of major routes. A reduction of the control areas would expose approximately 140 additional miles of primary road, rail and waterway lines of communication to armed reconnaissance, as well as hundreds of miles of secondary lines of communication, dependent upon NVN reactions and usage. Additional military targets would automatically become authorized for air strikes under armed reconnaissance operating authorities. This would broaden the target base, spread the defenses, and thus add to the cumulative effects of the interdiction program as well as reducing risk of

aircraft loss. At the present time, the air defense threat throughout all of the northeast area of NVN is formidable. It is not envisioned that aircraft will conduct classical low level armed reconnaissance up and down the newly exposed lines of communication until the air defense threat is fairly well neutralized. Attacks of LOC or LOC associated targets and moving targets in these areas will continue to be conducted for the time being using dive bombing, or "fixed target" tactics as is currently employed throughout the heavily defended northeast. Consequently, the risk to aircraft and crews will not be increased. In fact these new operating areas should assist in decreasing the risks. New targets within the control areas will continue to be approved in Washington.

7. There have been repeated and reliable intelligence reports that indicate civilians not engaged in essential war supporting activities have been evacuated from the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong. Photographic intelligence, particularly of Haiphong, clearly shows that materials of war are stockpiled in all open storage areas and along the streets throughout almost one-half of the city. Rather than an area for urban living, the city has become an armed camp and a large logistics storage base. Consequently, air strikes in and around these cities endanger personnel primarily engaged directly or indirectly in support of the war effort.

8. The special coastal armed reconnaissance area in the Northeast has limited attacks on NVN craft to those within 3 NM of the NVN coast or coastal islands. This constraint has provided another sanctuary to assist NVN in accommodating to the interdiction effort. To preclude endangering foreign shipping the requirement is imposed on strike forces to ensure positive identification prior to attack. Identification can be accomplished beyond an arbitrary 3 NM line as well as within it, and deny the enemy a privileged area. 38/

To complement the expanded strike program lifting these restrictions envisaged, the Chiefs asked for the expansion of the SEA DRAGON naval activities against coastal water traffic from 20° to the Chinese border, thereby opening up the possibility of attacks against some of the traffic moving supplies in and near the ports. Furthermore they desired permission to use sea-based SAMs, particularly the 100-mile range TALOS, against MIGs north of 20°. In concluding their discussion of the need for these new authorizations, the Chiefs were careful to hedge about

what results might be expected immediately. It was pointed out that adverse weather would continue to inhibit operations for several months and partially offset the new measures.

13. Authorization to conduct a campaign against North Vietnam employing air and naval forces under the proposed operating authorities should have a significant impact on the ability of NVN to continue to prosecute insurgency. It is not anticipated that this impact will be immediately apparent. Unfavorable weather, while partially offset by the expanded use of naval forces, will preclude air strike forces from applying the desired pressures at the most advantageous time and place. The cumulative effects of the air strikes and naval bombardment will gradually increase to significant proportions as erosion of the distribution system progresses. In addition to the material effects against NVN's capability to wage war, approval of the proposed operating authorities and execution of the campaign envisioned will signal to NVN and the remainder of the world the continued US resolve and determination to achieve our objectives in Southeast Asia. 39/

The ISA memo on bombing policy, drafted in Warnke's own office, tersely and emphatically rejected all of these JCS recommendations for expanding the air war, including mining the harbor approaches. The case against further extension of the bombing was made as follows:

The Campaign Against North Vietnam: A Different View

Bombing Policy

It is clear from the TET offensive that the air attack on the North and the interdiction campaign in Laos have not been successful in putting a low enough ceiling on infiltration of men and materials from the North to the South to prevent such a level of enemy action. We do not see the possibility of a campaign which could do more than make the enemy task more difficult. Bombing in Route Packages 6A and 6B is therefore primarily a political tool.

The J.C.S. recommend a substantial reduction in previous political control over the attacks in the Haiphong and Hanoi areas. Except for General Wheeler, we do not recommend such a reduction.

It is not until May that more than four good bombing days per month can be anticipated. The question arises as

to how best to use those opportunities. We believe the political value of the attacks should be optimized. We believe the political value of the attacks should be optimized. The effective destruction of clearly important military and economic targets without excessive population damage would seem indicated. Excessive losses in relation to results would have an adverse political effect. The air fields (perhaps including Gia Lam) would meet the criteria. The Hanoi power plant would probably meet the criteria. There are few other targets of sufficient importance, not already authorized, to do so.

In particular, this view opposes the proposal to define only 3-mile and 1-1/2-mile "closed areas" around Hanoi and Haiphong respectively. Individual targets within Hanoi and Haiphong and between the 10- and 3-mile circles for Hanoi and the 4 and 1-1/2 mile-circles for Haiphong, should be considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the above criteria. However, blanket authority for operations up to the 3-mile and 1-1/2-mile circles, respectively, appears to take in only small targets having no appreciable military significance; on the other hand, experience has indicated that systematic operations particularly against road and rail routes simply and slightly to the repair burdens, while at the same time involving substantial civilian casualties in the many suburban civilian areas located along these routes.

In addition, a picture of systematic and daily bombing this close to Hanoi and Haiphong seems to us to run significant risks of major adverse reactions in key third nations. There is certainly some kind of "flash point" in the ability of the British Government to maintain its support for our position, and we believe this "flash point" might well be crossed by the proposed operations, in contrast to operations against specified targets of the type that have been carried out in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas in the past.

Mining of Haiphong

We believe it to be agreed that substantial amounts of military-related supplies move through the Port of Haiphong at present. Nevertheless, it is also agreed that this flow of supplies could be made up through far greater use of the road and rail lines running through China, and through lightering and other emergency techniques

at Haiphong and other ports. In other words, even from a military standpoint the effect of closing the Port of Haiphong would be to impose an impediment only for a period of time, and to add to difficulties which Hanoi has shown in the past it can overcome. Politically, moreover, closing the Port of Haiphong continues to raise a serious question of Soviet reaction. Ambassador Thompson, Governor Harriman, and others believe that the Soviets would be compelled to react in some manner -- at a minimum through the use of minesweepers and possibly through protective naval action of some sort. Again, we continue to believe that there is some kind of "flash point" both in terms of these likely actions and their implications for our relation with the Soviets in other matters, and for such more remote -- but not inconceivable -- possibilities as Soviet compensating pressure elsewhere, for example against Berlin. Even a small risk of a significant confrontation with the Soviets must be given major weight against the limited military gains anticipated from this action.

Finally, by throwing the burden of supply onto the rail and road lines through China, the mining of Haiphong would tend to increase Chinese leverage in Hanoi and would force the Soviets and the Chinese to work out cooperative arrangements for their new and enlarged transit. We do not believe this would truly drive the Soviets and Chinese together, but it would force them to take a wider range of common positions that would certainly not be favorable to our basic interests.

Expanded Naval Operations (SEA DRAGON)

These operations, expanded north along the coast to Haiphong and to other port areas, would include provision for avoiding ocean-going ships, while hitting coast-wise shipping assumed to be North Vietnamese.

We believe this distinction will not be easy to apply without error, and that therefore the course of action involves substantial risks of serious complications with Chinese and other shipping. In view of the extensive measures already authorized further south, we doubt if the gains to be achieved would warrant these risks.

Surface-to-Air Missiles

As in the past, we believe this action would involve substantial risk of triggering some new form of North

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Vietnamese military action against the ships involved. Moreover, another factor is whether we can be fully certain of target identification. The balance on this one is extremely close, but we continue to question whether expected gains would counter-balance the risks. 40/

It is interesting that the entire discussion of bombing on both sides in the DPM is devoted to various kinds of escalation. The proposal that was eventually to be adopted, namely cutting back the bombing to the panhandle only, was not even mentioned, nor does it appear in any of the other drafts or papers related to the Clifford Group's work. The fact may be misleading, however, since it apparently was one of the principle ideas being discussed and considered in the forums at various levels. It is hard to second-guess the motivation of a Secretary of Defense, but, since it is widely believed that Clifford personally advocated this idea to the President, he may well have decided that fully countering the JCS recommendations for escalation was sufficient for the formal DPM. To have raised the idea of constricting the bombing below the 19th or 20th parallel in the memo to the President would have generalized the knowledge of such a suggestion and invited its sharp, full and formal criticism by the JCS and other opponents of a bombing halt. Whatever Clifford's reasons, the memo did not contain the proposal that was to be the main focus of the continuing debates in March and would eventually be endorsed by the President.

C. The President Weighs the Decision

1. More Meetings and More Alternatives

The idea of a partial bombing halt was not new within the Administration. It had been discussed in some form or other as a possible alternative at various times for more than a year. (In the DPM of May 20, 1967, McNamara had formally proposed the idea to the President.) It was brought up anew early in the Clifford Group deliberations and, while not adopted in the final report, became the main alternative under consideration in the continuing meetings of the various groups that had been formed for the Clifford exercise. As indicated previously, Secretary Clifford reportedly suggested personally to the President the idea of cutting back the bombing to the North Vietnamese panhandle. The first appearance of the idea in the documents in March is in a note from Clifford to Wheeler on the 5th transmitting for the latter's exclusive "information" a proposed "statement" drafted by Secretary Rusk. The statement, which was given only the status of a "suggestion" and therefore needed to be closely held, announced the suspension of the bombing of North Vietnam except in the "area associated with the battle zone." It was presumably intended for Presidential delivery. Attached to the draft statement, which shows Rusk himself as the draftee, was a list of explanatory reasons and conditions for its adoption. Rusk noted that bad weather in northern North

Vietnam in the next few months would severely hamper operations around Hanoi and Haiphong in any event and the proposal did not, therefore, constitute a serious degradation of our military position. It was to be understood that in the event of any major enemy initiative in the south, either against Khe Sanh or the cities, the bombing would be resumed. Further, Rusk did not want a major diplomatic effort mounted to start peace talks. He preferred to let the action speak for itself and await Hanoi's reaction. Finally, he noted that the area still open to bombing would include everything up to and including Vinh (just below 19°) and there would be no limitations on attacks in that zone. 41/ Clifford's views of the proposal and its explanation do not appear in his note. It can be inferred, however, that he endorsed the idea. In any case, by the middle of March the question of a partial bombing halt became the dominant air war alternative under consideration in meetings at State and Defense. It is possible that the President had already indicated to Clifford and Rusk enough approval of the idea to have focused the further deliberative efforts of his key advisors on it.

On March 8, Bundy sent a TS-NODIS memo to CIA Director Helms requesting a CIA evaluation of four different bombing options and troop deployment packages, none of which, however, included even a partial bombing halt. Indicating that he had consulted with Secretary Rusk and Walt Rostow before making his request, he noted the CIA papers already discussed in this study but expressed a need for one overall summary paper. The options he wanted evaluated were:

A. An early announcement of reinforcements on the order of 25,000 men, coupled with reserve calls and other measures adequate to make another 75,000 men available for deployment by the end of the year if required and later decided. The bombing would be stepped up as the weather improved, and would include some new targets, but would not include the mining of Haiphong or major urban attacks in Hanoi and Haiphong.

B. A similar announcement of immediate reinforcement action, coupled with greater actions than in A to raise our total force strength, making possible additional reinforcements of roughly 175,000 men before the end of 1968. Bombing program as in A.

C. Option A plus mining of Haiphong and/or significantly intensified bombing of urban targets in Hanoi and Haiphong areas.

D. Option B plus an intensified bombing program and/or mining of Haiphong. 42/

In addition to an assessment of likely DRV reactions, he wanted to know what could be expected from the Chinese and the Soviets under each option. He also noted that, "At this stage, none of us knows what the timing of

the decision-making will be. I think this again argued for a CIA-only paper at the outset, to be completed perhaps by next Wednesday night /March 13/.^{43/}

A more complicated draft memo to CIA asking for a review of various bombing alternatives was prepared at about the same time in ISA, but apparently not sent. It contained twelve highly specific different bombing alternatives, including three different bombing reduction or halt options: (1) a concentration of bombing in Route Packages 1, 2 and 3 with only 5% in the extreme north; (2) a complete halt over North Vietnam; and (3) a complete halt over both North Vietnam and Laos. ^{44/} No particular attention was focused on a partial halt, again indicating that knowledge of the proposal was being restricted to the immediate circle of Presidential advisors. Presumably the CIA did prepare a memo in response to Bundy's request, but it does not appear in the available material.

Meanwhile, a separate set of escalatory options had been proposed to Mr. Nitze by Air Force Secretary Brown on March 4 in response to the latter's February 28 request. ^{45/} Brown's view was that apart from the various ground strategy alternatives, there were also a number of ways the air war, both north and south, could be expanded to meet the changed situation after Tet. The three alternatives he suggested were:

1. First, actions against North Vietnam could be intensified by bombing of remaining important targets, and/or neutralization of the port of Haiphong by bombing and mining.
2. Second, air actions could be intensified in the adjoining panhandle areas of Laos/NVN.
3. Third, a change to the basic strategy in SVN is examined, in which increased air actions in SVN are substituted for increased ground forces. ^{46/}

Brown appraised the relative advantages of the various proposed campaigns in this way:

Intensification of air actions against NVN would be aimed at forcing the enemy to the conference table or choking off imports to NVN to an extent which would make their level of effort in SVN insupportable. The second and third campaigns, individually or together, are more limited in aim. It appears likely that, given adequate sortie capability, the greatest adverse effect on the enemy would result from a plan which simultaneously employed all three campaigns. ^{47/}

Under program #1, Brown envisaged the elimination of virtually all the constraints under which the bombing then operated and an aggressive attack

on North Vietnamese resources; import capability and population centers along the lines of proposals from CINCPAC:

The present restrictions on bombing NVN would be lifted so as to permit bombing of military targets without the present scrupulous concern for collateral civilian damage and casualties. The following targets systems would be emphasized:

1. Military control points, military headquarters, storage facilities, government control centers, and such population centers as are known to harbor dispersed materiel and vehicles.

2. The Ports of Haiphong, Hon Gai and Cam Pha, by a combination of mining and bombing. This would be designed to force over-the-beach delivery of seaborne imports which would require shipping to remain off the coast in unsheltered waters, thereby restricting operations to periods of relative calm seas.

3. Over-the-beach deliveries by bombing and possibly mining.

4. Intensified bombing attacks on the northeast and northwest rail lines and other road LOCs contiguous to the NVN-Chicom border. 48/

The objective to be achieved by this expanded campaign was described in the succeeding paragraph:

The aims of this alternative campaign would be to erode the will of the population by exposing a wider area of NVN to casualties and destruction; to reduce maritime imports by closing the major ports, and by attacking the resulting over-the-beach deliveries; to bring about a saturation of remaining import arteries, thereby creating greater target densities; and to disrupt the movement of supplies into SVN by attacking military control points and storage facilities wherever located. The hopeful assumption is that North Vietnam would then be forced to decide on a priority of imports--war-making goods vs. life-supporting goods--and that it would choose the latter. This in turn would attenuate its ability to supply forces in SVN and would thus slow down the tempo of the fighting there. In time, these cumulative pressures would be expected to bring NVN to negotiation of a compromise settlement, or to abandonment of the fight in SVN. 49/

The Soviet and Chinese reactions to these measures were expected to be confined to increased aid, some "volunteers" and an overall worsening of relations with the U.S. All these were regarded as manageable if not desirable. But in evaluating the likely results of such a bombing program, Brown was forced to admit that:

Barring that effect, I would judge that Campaign #1 can, in military terms, limit SVN actions by NVN near their pre-Tet level, and below the level of February 1968. This campaign cannot be demonstrated quantitatively to be likely to reduce NVN capability in SVN substantially below the 1967 level, but in view of possible disruption of North Vietnamese distribution capability around Hanoi and Haiphong, such an effect could take place. The campaign would take place beginning in March, and should conceivably have its maximum effect by October. During the following season of poor weather, the North Vietnamese transportation system would begin to be reconstituted.

The other possible impact is on the North Vietnamese will to continue the war. Clearly their society would be under even greater stress than it is now. But so long as they have the promise of continued Soviet and Chinese material support, and substantial prospect of stalemate or better in SVN, the North Vietnamese government is likely to be willing to undergo these hardships. Its control over the populace will remain good enough so that the latter will have no choice but to do so. 50/

The other two programs were regarded as having even less potential for inhibiting communist activity in the south. Program #2 involved simply a greatly intensified program of strikes in the panhandle areas of North Vietnam and Laos, while Program #3 proposed the substantial relocation of South Vietnamese population into secure zones and the designation of the remaining cleared areas as "free strike" regions for intensified air attack. Brown's three alternatives apparently did not get wide attention, however, and were never considered as major proposals within the inner circle of Presidential advisors. Nevertheless, the fact that they were supported by over fifty pages of detailed analysis done by the Air Staff is a reflection of the importance everyone attached to the reassessment going on within the Administration.

Of the other major advisors, Katzenbach had participated to a limited degree in the Clifford Group work and reportedly was opposed to the subsequent proposal for a partial suspension because he felt that a bombing halt was a trump card that could be used only once and should not be wasted when the prospects for a positive North Vietnamese response on negotiations seemed so poor. He reportedly hoped to convince the

President to call a complete halt to the air war later in the spring when prospects for peace looked better and when the threat to Khe Sanh had been eliminated. 51/ Walt Rostow, the President's personal advisor on national security matters, apparently resisted all suggestions for a restriction of the bombing, preferring to keep the pressure on the North Vietnamese for a response to the San Antonio formula. These various opinions represented the principal advice the President was receiving from his staff within the Administration. Other advice from outside, both invited and uninvited, also played a part in the final decision.

2. The New Hampshire Primary

In the days immediately following the early March deliberations, the President, toiling over the most difficult decision of his career, was faced with another problem of great magnitude -- how to handle the public reaction to Tet and the dwindling public support for his war policies. From this point of view probably the most difficult week of the Johnson Presidency began on March 10 when the New York Times broke the story of General Westmoreland's 206,000 man troop request in banner headlines. 52/ The story was a collaborative effort by four reporters of national reputation and had the kind of detail to give it the ring of authenticity to the reading public. In fact, it was very close to the truth in its account of the proposal from MACV and the debate going on within the Administration. The story was promptly picked up by other newspapers and by day's end had reached from one end of the country to the other. The President was reportedly furious at this leak which amounted to a flagrant and dangerous compromise of security. Later in the month an investigation was conducted to cut down on the possibility of such leaks in the future.

The following day, March 11, Secretary Rusk went before Fulbright's Senate Foreign Relations Committee for the first time in two years for nationally televised hearings on U.S. war policy. In sessions that lasted late that Monday and continued on Tuesday, the Secretary was subjected to sharp questioning by virtually every member. While he confirmed the fact of an "A to Z" policy review within the Administration, he found himself repeatedly forced to answer questions obliquely or not at all to avoid compromising the President. These trying two days of testimony by Secretary Rusk was completed only hours before the results from the New Hampshire primary began to come in. To the shock and consternation of official Washington, the President had defeated his upstart challenger, Eugene McCarthy, who had based his campaign on a halt in the bombing and an end to the war, by only the slenderest of margins. (In fact, when the write-in vote was finally tabulated later that week, McCarthy had actually obtained a slight plurality over the President in the popular vote.) The reaction across

the country was electric. It was clear that Lyndon Johnson, the master politician, had been successfully challenged, not by an attractive and appealing alternative vote-getter, but by a candidate who had been able to mobilize and focus all the discontent and disillusionment about the war. National politics in the election year 1968 would not be the same thereafter.

Critics of the President's policies in Vietnam in both parties were buoyed by the New Hampshire results. But for Senator Robert Kennedy they posed a particularly acute dilemma. With the President's vulnerability on Vietnam now demonstrated, should Kennedy, his premier political opponent on this and other issues, now throw his hat in the ring? After four days of muddling with his advisers, and first informing both the President and Senator McCarthy, Kennedy announced his candidacy on March 16. For President Johnson, the threat was now real. McCarthy, even in the flush of a New Hampshire victory, could not reasonably expect to unseat the incumbent President. But Kennedy was another matter. The President now faced the prospect of a long and divisive battle for renomination within his own party against a very strong contender, with the albatross of an unpopular war hanging around his neck.

For the moment at least, the President appeared determined. On March 17, he spoke to the National Farmers' Union and said that the trials of American responsibility in Vietnam would demand a period of domestic "austerity" and a "total national effort." ^{53/} Further leaks, however, were undercutting his efforts to picture the Administration as firm and resolute about doing whatever was necessary. On March 17, the New York Times had again run a story on the debate within the Administration. This time the story stated that the 205,000 figure would not be approved but that something between 35,000 and 50,000 more troops would be sent to Vietnam, necessitating some selective call-up of reserves. ^{54/} Again the reporters were disturbingly accurate in their coverage. Criticism of the President continued to mount. Spurred by the New Hampshire indications of massive public disaffection with the President's policy, 139 members of the House of Representatives co-authored a resolution calling for a complete reappraisal of U.S. Vietnam policy including a Congressional review.

3. ISA Attempts to Force a Decision

The President's reluctance to make a decision about Vietnam and the dramatic external political developments in the U.S. kept the members of the Administration busy in a continuing round of new draft proposals and further meetings on various aspects of the proposals the President was considering. Within ISA at the Pentagon, attention focused on ways to get some movement on the negotiations in the absence of any

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decisions on forces or bombing. On March 11, Policy Planning produced a lengthy draft memo to Clifford outlining the history of Hanoi's positions on "talks", "negotiations", "settlement", and "no advantage" provision of the San Antonio formula. Its conclusion was that Hanoi had indicated "acceptance of the operative portion of the San Antonio formula," if we really wished to acknowledge it. 55/ Policy Planning suggested testing this by asking them to repeat recent private assurances about not attacking Khe Sanh, the cities, across the DMZ, etc. In an effort to move the Administration to a more forthcoming interpretation of the San Antonio formula, this memo proposed discussions with GVN to define what constituted North Vietnamese acceptance.

The memo which Warnke signed the next day went to both Clifford and Nitze and began with the statement: "I believe that we should begin to take steps now which will make possible the opening of negotiations with Hanoi within the next few months. I believe that such negotiations are much much in our interest...." 56/ His arguments were: With respect to the San Antonio formula, he pointed to a number of Hanoi statements accepting the "prompt and productive" U.S. stipulation for the negotiations, and offered his opinion that Hanoi had also hinted understanding and acquiescence in the "no advantage" provision. Warnke argued that further U.S. probing for assurances about "no advantage" would only reinforce Hanoi's impression that this was really a condition. If this occurred, he argued, Hanoi "may continue to denounce the San Antonio formula in public. This will make it difficult for us to halt the bombing if we decide that it is in our interest to do so." 57/ On the basis of these conclusions, Warnke recommended discussions with the GVN to explain our view of the desirability of negotiations and urged the completion of an inter-agency study preparing a U.S. position for the negotiations. He summed up his recommendation as follows:

After holding discussions with the GVN and completing the interagency study, we should halt the bombing and enter into negotiations, making "no advantage" and mutual de-escalation the first and immediate order of business at the negotiations.

If you approve this course of action, we will work with State on a detailed scenario for you to discuss with Mr. Rusk and the President. 58/

Attached to Warnke's memo were separate supporting tabs outlining Hanoi's public and private responses to the San Antonio formula and arguing that Hanoi's conception of an acceptable negotiated settlement, as revealed in its statements, embodied a good deal of flexibility.

On the same day, Warnke signed a memo to the Director of CIA requesting a study of seven alternative bombing campaigns for the future. For unknown reasons, the memo was apparently never sent. 59/ The options for examination in this memo were all taken from the earlier draft memo with twelve options. Options 1-3 were all reduction or half options, but the wording of them suggests again that ISA was not aware of the high level attention being focused on a complete bombing halt north of 20°.

Neither Clifford's nor Nitze's reaction to Warnke's memo is available in the files, but two days later the Policy Planning Staff drafted a memorandum to the President for Clifford's signature which recommended a leveling off of our effort in the war -- i.e., no new troops and a reconcentration of the bombing to the panhandle area. The memo went through several drafts and is probably typical of efforts going on simultaneously in other agencies. In its final form it urged the retargeting of air strikes from the top of the funnel in North Vietnam to the panhandle with only enough sorties northward to prevent the DRV from relocating air defenses to the south. 60/ A more detailed discussion of the bombing alternatives was appended to the memo and included consideration of four alternative programs. The first two were (1) a continuation of the current bombing program; and (2) an increase in the bombing including the reduction of the restricted zones and the mining of Haiphong. These two were analyzed jointly as follows:

The bombing of North Vietnam was undertaken to limit and/or make more difficult the infiltration of men and supplies in the South, to show Hanoi that it would have a price for its continued aggression, and to raise morale in South Vietnam. The last two purposes obviously have been achieved.

It has become abundantly clear that no level of bombing can prevent the North Vietnamese from supplying the forces and materiel necessary to maintain their military operations in the South at current levels. The recent Tet offensive has shown that the bombing cannot even prevent a significant increase in these military operations, at least on an intermittent basis. Moreover, the air war has not been very successful when measured by its impact on North Vietnam's economy. In spite of the large diversion of men and materials necessitated by the bombing, communist foreign aid and domestic reallocation of manpower have sharply reduced the destruction effect of our air strikes." 61/

The other two alternatives considered were a partial and a complete cessation of the bombing. Here is how ISA presented them:

3. A revision of the bombing effort in North Vietnam so that a maximum effort is exerted against the LOC's in Route Packages 1, 2, and 3 with bombing north of the 20th parallel limited to a level designed to cover only the most significant military targets and prevent the redistribution southward of air defenses, e.g. 5% of the attack sorties.

This reprogramming of our bombing efforts would devote primary emphasis on the infiltration routes south of the 20th parallel in the panhandle area of North Vietnam just to the north of the DMZ. It includes all of the areas now within Route Packages 1, 2 and 3. This program recognizes that our bombing emphasis should be designed to prevent military men and materiel from moving out of North Vietnam and into the South, rather than attempting to prevent materiel from entering North Vietnam. Occasional attack sorties north of this area would be employed to keep enemy air defenses and damage repair crews from relocating and to permit attack against the most important fixed targets. The effort against this part of North Vietnam through which all land infiltration passes would be intensive and sustained. Yet it provides Hanoi with a clear message that for political reasons we are willing to adjust our military tactics to accommodate a constructive move toward peace. A distinct benefit of this decision would be the lower plane loss rates which are realized in the southern areas of North Vietnam. (In 1967 the joint loss rate per thousand sorties in Route Packages 1, 2 and 3 was 1.36, while it was 5.73 in the more heavily defended Route Package 6 in which Hanoi and Haiphong are located.)

4. A complete cessation of all bombing in North Vietnam.

It would be politically untenable to initiate a complete cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam at a time when our forces in the northern provinces of South Vietnam are seriously threatened by large forces of North Vietnamese regulars, unless we were confident that these attacks would cease. Nevertheless, we must recognize that our intelligence analysts have advised that in spite of our significant bombing effort over the last 2-1/2 years, Hanoi retains the capability and the will to support the present or an increased level of hostilities in South Vietnam. On the other hand, they inform us that:

"If, however, the U.S. ceased the bombing of North Vietnam in the near future, Hanoi would probably respond

more or less as indicated in its most recent statements. It would begin talks fairly soon, would accept a fairly wide ranging exploration of issues, but would not moderate its terms for a final settlement or stop fighting in the South."

As discussed elsewhere in this memorandum, a cessation of the bombing by us in North Vietnam is the required first step if a political solution to the conflict is to be found. We may want to seek some assurance from Hanoi that it would not attack from across the DMZ if we halt the bombing. Alternatively, we could stop all bombing except that directly related to ground operations and indicate that our attacks are in the nature of returning fire and will be halted when the enemy halts its attacks in the area. 62/

These views of Clifford's staff never went to the White House, but are indicative of the direction and tone of the debates in the policy meetings within the Administration. Another aspect of the policy environment in March 1968 was ISA's isolation in arguing that Hanoi was moving toward acceptance of the San Antonio formula and a negotiated settlement. As we shall see, when the decision to halt the bombing north of 20° was finally made, it was not in the expectation that North Vietnam would come to the negotiating table.

4. The "Senior Informal Advisory Group"

At this juncture in mid-March, with the President vacillating as to a course of action, probably the most important influence on his thinking and ultimate decision was exercised by a small group of prominent men outside the Government, known in official Washington as the "Senior Informal Advisory Group." All had at one time or another over the last twenty years served as Presidential advisers. They gathered in Washington at the request of the President on March 18 to be briefed on the latest developments in the war and to offer Mr. Johnson the benefit of their experience in making a tough decision. Stuart Loory of the Los Angeles Times in an article in May reported what has been generally considered to be a reliable account of what took place during and after their visit to Washington and what advice they gave the President. The story as Loory reported it is included here in its entirety.

Hawks' Shift Precipitated Bombing Halt

Eight prominent hawks and a dove -- all from outside the government -- gathered in the White House for a night and day last March to judge the progress of the Vietnam war for President Johnson.

Their deliberations produced this verdict for the chief executive:

Continued escalation of the war -- intensified bombing of North Vietnam and increased American troop strength in the South -- would do no good. Forget about seeking a battlefield solution to the problem and instead intensify efforts to seek a political solution at the negotiating table.

The manner in which Mr. Johnson sought the advice of the nine men before arriving at the conclusion to de-escalate the war announced in his now famous March 31 speech, has been pieced together from conversations with reliable sources who asked to remain anonymous.

The nine men, Republicans and Democrats with extensive experience in formulating foreign policy, were among those frequently consulted by Mr. Johnson from time to time during the war. At each consultation prior to March they had been overwhelmingly in favor of prosecuting the war vigorously with more men and material, with intensified bombing of North Vietnam, with increased efforts to create a viable government in the South.

As recently as last December they had expressed this view to the President. The only dissenter among them -- one who had been a dissenter from the beginning -- was former Undersecretary of State George Ball.

March 18th Meeting

The men who have come to be known to a small circle in the government as the President's "senior informal advisory group" convened in the White House early on the evening of March 18th.

Present in addition to Ball were: Arthur Dean, a Republican New York lawyer who was a Korean War negotiator during the Eisenhower administration; Dean Acheson, former President Truman's Secretary of State; Gen. Matthew B. Ridgeway, the retired commander of United Nations troops in Korea; Gen. Maxwell Taylor, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Cyrus Vance, former Deputy Defense Secretary and a key troubleshooter for the Johnson Administration; McGeorge Bundy, Ford Foundation President who had been special assistant for National security affairs to Mr. Johnson and former President Kennedy; former Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon and Gen. Omar Bradley, a leading supporter of the President's war policies.

First the group met over dinner with Secretary of State Dean Rusk; Defense Secretary Clark M. Clifford; Ambassador W. Averell Harriman; Walt W. Rostow, the President's special assistant for National security affairs; Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Richard Helms, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency; Paul Nitze, Deputy Defense Secretary; Nicholas Katzenbach, Under Secretary of State; and William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

The outsiders questioned the government officials carefully on the war, the pacification program and the condition of the South Vietnamese government after the Tet offensive. They included in their deliberations the effect of the war on the United States.

Three Briefings

After dinner the government officials left and the group received three briefings.

Philip C. Habib, a deputy to William Bundy and now a member of the American negotiating team in Paris, delivered an unusually frank briefing on the conditions in Vietnam after the Tet offensive. He covered such matters as corruption in South Vietnam and the growing refugee problem.

Habib, according to reliable sources, told the group that the Saigon government was generally weaker than had been realized as a result of the Tet offensive. He related the situation, some said, with greater frankness than the group had previously heard.

In addition to Habib, Maj. Gen. William E. DePuy, special assistant to the Joint Chiefs for counterinsurgency and special activities, briefed the group on the military situation, and George Carver, a CIA analyst, gave his agency's estimates of conditions in the war zone.

The briefings by DePuy and Carver reflected what many understood as a dispute over enemy strength between the Defense Department and the CIA which has been previously reported. Discrepancies in the figures resulted from the fact that DePuy's estimates of enemy strength covered only identifiable military units, while Carver's included all known military, paramilitary and parttime enemy strength available.

Striking Turnabout

The morning of March 19, the advisory group assembled in the White House to discuss what they had heard the previous evening and arrived at their verdict. It was a striking turnabout in attitude for all but Ball.

After their meeting, the group met the President for lunch. It was a social affair. No business was transacted. The meal finished, the advisers delivered their verdict to the President.

He was reportedly greatly surprised at their conclusions. When he asked them where they had obtained the facts on which the conclusions were based, the group told him of the briefings by Habib, DePuy and Carver.

Mr. Johnson knew that the three men had also briefed his governmental advisers, but he had not received the same picture of the war as Rostow presented the reports to him.

As a result of the discrepancy, the President ordered his own direct briefings. At least Habib and DePuy -- and almost certainly Carver -- had evening sessions with the President.

Habib was reportedly as frank with the President as he had been with the advisory group. The President asked tough questions. "Habib stuck to his guns," one source reported.

On top of all this, Clifford, since he had become Defense Secretary, came to the same conclusions Robert S. McNamara had reached -- that the bombing of North Vietnam was not achieving its objectives.

The impact of this group's recommendation coupled with the new briefings the President received about conditions and prospects in the war zone were major factors in cementing the decision not to expand the war but to attempt a de-escalation. The Joint Chiefs for their part were still seeking authorization to strike targets with the Hanoi and Haiphong restricted areas and further escalation of the bombing. On March 19, a Tuesday, they proposed hitting one target in Hanoi and one in Haiphong that had previously been rejected by both Rusk and McNamara plus the Hanoi docks near large population concentrations. 63/ These were probably considered at the noon luncheon at the White House, but they were apparently not approved as no attacks occurred. The military leaders, even at this late hour when the disposition of the administration against any further escalation seemed clear, still pressed for new targets and new authority.

D. March 31 -- "I Shall Not Seek...Another Term as Your President."

1. The Decision.

No exact date on which the President made the decision to curtail the bombing can be identified with certainty. It is reasonably clear that the decisions on the ground war were made on or before March 22. On that date, the President announced that General William Westmoreland would be replaced as COMUSMACV during the coming summer. He was to return to Washington to become Chief of Staff of the Army. The decision was clearly related to the force deployment decisions explicitly taken and the new strategy they implied. Three days after this announcement, that had been greeted in the press as a harbinger, General Creighton Abrams, Deputy COMUSMACV, arrived in Washington without prior announcement for conferences with the President. Speculation was rife that he was to be named Westmoreland's successor. On the 26th he and the President huddled and Mr. Johnson probably informed him of his intentions, both with respect to force augmentations and the bombing restraint, and his intention to designate Abrams the new COMUSMACV. In the days that followed, the speech drafters took over, writing and rewriting the President's momentous address. Finally, it was decided that the announcement speech would be made on nation-wide television from the White House on the evening of March 31.

The night before the speech a cable under Katzenbach's signature, drafted by William Bundy, went out to US Embassies in Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Laos, the Philippines and South Korea slugged "Literally Eyes Only for Ambassador or Charge." It instructed the addressees that they were to see their heads of government and inform them that:

After full consultation with GVN and with complete concurrence of Thieu and Ky, President plans policy announcement Sunday night that would have following major elements:

a. Major stress on importance of GVN and ARVN increased effectiveness, with our equipment and other support as first priority in our own actions.

b. 13,500 support forces to be called up at once in order to round out the 10,500 combat units sent in February.

c. Replenishment of strategic reserve by calling up 48,500 additional reserves, stating that these would be designed for strategic reserve.

d. Related tax increases and budget cuts already largely needed for non-Vietnam reasons.

...In addition, after similar consultation and concurrence, President proposes to announce that bombing will be restricted

to targets most directly engaged in the battlefield area and that this meant that there would be no bombing north of 20th parallel. Announcement would leave open how Hanoi might respond, and would be open-ended as to time. However, it would indicate that Hanoi's response could be helpful in determining whether we were justified in assumption that Hanoi would not take advantage if we stopping bombing altogether. Thus, it would to this extent foreshadow possibility of full bombing stoppage at a later point. 64/

The significance of the decision they were to communicate to their respective heads of government could hardly have been lost on the Ambassadors. Nevertheless, the cable dramatized the importance of preventing premature leaks by stating that the Ambassadors were to tell the heads of Government to whom they were accredited that they were "under strictest injunction to hold it in total confidence and not to tell any one repeat anyone until after announcement is made. This is vital. Similarly you should tell no member of your staff whatever." 65/ It is important to note that the cable defines the delimited area for the bombing halt as north of 20°. This apparently was the intent of the President and his advisors all along, but sometime before the speech was delivered any specific reference to the geographic point of limitation was eliminated, for undetermined reasons, if it ever had been included.

The March 30 cable offered the Ambassadors some additional explanatory rationale for the new course that they were to use at their discretion in conversations with their heads of government. These are important because they represent the only available recorded statement by the Administration of its understanding of the purposes and expectations behind the new direction in Vietnam policy. It is also significant that the points concerning the bombing halt are extremely close to those in Secretary Rusk's draft points of March 5. Here, then, is how the Administration understood the new policy, and wished to have understood by our allies:

a. You should call attention to force increases that would be announced at the same time and would make clear our continued resolve. Also our top priority to re-equipping ARVN forces.

b. You should make clear that Hanoi is most likely to denounce the project and thus free our hand after a short period. Nonetheless, we might wish to continue the limitation even after a formal denunciation, in order to reinforce its sincerity and put the monkey firmly on Hanoi's back for whatever follows. Of course, any major military change could compel full-scale resumption at any time.

c. With or without denunciation, Hanoi might well feel limited in conducting any major offensives at least in the

northern areas. If they did so, this could ease the pressure where it is most potentially serious. If they did not, then this would give us a clear field for whatever actions were then required.

d. In view of weather limitations, bombing north of the 20th parallel will in any event be limited at least for the next four weeks or so -- which we tentatively envisage as a maximum testing period in any event. Hence, we are not giving up anything really serious in this time frame. Moreover, air power now used north of 20th can probably be used in Laos (where no policy change planned) and in SVN.

e. Insofar as our announcement foreshadows any possibility of a complete bombing stoppage, in the event Hanoi really exercises reciprocal restraints, we regard this as unlikely. But in any case, the period of demonstrated restraint would probably have to continue for a period of several weeks, and we would have time to appraise the situation and to consult carefully with them before we undertook any such action. 66/

It is important to note that the Administration did not expect the bombing restraint to produce a positive Hanoi reply. This view apparently was never seriously disputed at any time during the long month of deliberations within the Government, except by ISA. The fact that the President was willing to go beyond the San Antonio formula and curtail the air raids at a time when few responsible advisors were suggesting that such action would produce peace talks is strong evidence of the major shift in thinking that took place in Washington about the war and the bombing after Tet 1968. The fact of anticipated bad weather over much of northern North Vietnam in the succeeding months is important in understanding the timing of the halt, although it can plausibly be argued that many advisors would have found another convenient rationale if weather had been favorable.

Finally, the message concluded with an invitation for the respective governments to respond positively to the announcement and with an apology for the tardiness with which they were being informed of this momentous action. "Vital Congressional timing factors" was the rather lame excuse offered, along with the need for "full and frank" consultation with the GVN before the decision (contradicting the impression the GVN put out after the announcement). The stage was thus finally set for the drama of the President's speech.

2. The Speech

At 9:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on Thursday March 31 Lyndon Johnson stepped before the TV cameras in the Oval Room of the White House and began, in grave and measured tones, one of the most

important speeches of his life. His first words struck the theme of what was to come:

Good Evening, my fellow Americans.

Tonight I want to speak to you of peace in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. 67/

Underscoring the peaceful motivations of past and present U.S. policy in the area, he reviewed the recent history of U.S. attempts to bring peace to Vietnam:

For years, representatives of our government and others have travelled the world -- seeking to find a basis for peace talks.

Since last September, they have carried the offer that I made public at San Antonio.

That offer was this:

That the United States would stop its bombardment of North Vietnam when that would lead promptly to productive discussions -- and that we would assume that North Vietnam would not take military advantage of our restraint.

Hanoi denounced this offer, both privately and publicly. Even while the search for peace was going on, North Vietnam rushed their preparations for a savage assault on the people, the government, and the allies of South Vietnam.

The President noted that the Viet Cong had apparently decided to make 1968 the year of decision in Vietnam and their Tet offensive had been the unsuccessful attempt to win a breakthrough victory. Although they had failed, the President acknowledged their capability to renew the attacks if they wished. He forcefully asserted, however, that the allies would again have the power to repel their assault if they did decide to attack. Continuing, he led up to his announcement of the bombing halt in this way:

If they do mount another round of heavy attacks, they will not succeed in destroying the fighting power of South Vietnam and its allies.

But tragically, this is also clear: many men -- on both sides of the struggle -- will be lost. A nation that has already suffered 20 years of warfare will suffer once again. Armies on both sides will take new casualties. And the war will go on.

There is no need for this to be so.

There is no need to delay the talks that could bring an end to the long and this bloody war.

Tonight, I renew the offer I made last August -- to stop the bombardment of North Vietnam. We ask that talks begin promptly, that they be serious talks on the substance of peace. We assume that during those talks Hanoi will not take advantage of our restraint.

We are prepared to move immediately toward peace through negotiations.

So, tonight, in the hope that this action will lead to early talks, I am taking the first step to de-escalate the conflict. We are reducing -- substantially reducing -- the present level of hostilities.

And we are doing so unilaterally, and at once.

Tonight, I have ordered our aircraft and our naval vessels to make no attacks on North Vietnam, except in the area north of the DeMilitarized Zone where the continuing enemy build-up directly threatens allied forward positions and where the movements of their troops and supplies are clearly related to that threat.

The President then defined, albeit vaguely, the area within which the bombing would be restricted and suggested that all bombing could halt if the other side would reciprocate by scaling down hostilities.

The area in which we are stopping our attacks includes almost 90 percent of North Vietnam's population, and most of its territory. Thus there will be no attacks around the principal populated areas, or in the food-producing areas of North Vietnam.

Even this very limited bombing of the North could come to an early end -- if our restraint is matched by restraint in Hanoi. But I cannot in good conscience stop all bombing so long as to do so would immediately and directly endanger the lives of our men and our allies. Whether a complete bombing halt becomes possible in the future will be determined by events.

In the hope that the unilateral U.S. initiative would "permit the contending forces to move closer to a political settlement," the President called on the UK and the Soviet Union to do what they could to get negotiations started. Repeating his offer to meet at any time and place he designated his representative should talks actually occur:

I am designating one of our most distinguished Americans, Ambassador Averell Harriman, as my personal representative for such talks. In addition, I have asked Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson, who returned from Moscow for consultation, to be available to join Ambassador Harriman at Geneva or any other suitable place -- just as soon as Hanoi agrees to a conference.

I call upon President Ho Chi Minh to respond positively, and favorably, to this new step toward peace.

But if peace does not come now through negotiations, it will come when Hanoi understands that our common resolve is unshakable, and our common strength is invincible.

Turning his attention to other matters, the President outlined the limited steps that the U.S. would take to strengthen its forces in South Vietnam and the measures he would push to improve the South Vietnamese Army. He then discussed the costs of the new efforts, the domestic frugality they would require, and the balance of payments efforts necessary to their implementation. Next he outlined his own views of the unlikelihood of peace, in an attempt to head off any false hope that the bombing cessation might generate:

Now let me give you my estimate of the chances for peace:

-- the peace that will one day stop the bloodshed in South Vietnam,

-- that all the Vietnamese people will be permitted to rebuild and develop their land,

-- that will permit us to turn more fully to our own tasks here at home.

I cannot promise that the initiative that I have announced tonight will be completely successful in achieving peace any more than the 30 others that we have undertaken and agreed to in recent years.

But it is our fervent hope that North Vietnam, after years of fighting that has left the issue unresolved, will

now cease its efforts to achieve a military victory and will join with us in moving toward the peace table.

And there may come a time when South Vietnam -- on both sides -- are able to work out a way to settle their own differences by free political choice rather than by war.

As Hanoi considers its course, it should be in no doubt of our intentions. It must not miscalculate the pressures within our democracy in this election year.

We have no intention of widening this war.

But the United States will never accept a fake solution to this long and arduous struggle and call it peace.

No one can foretell the precise terms of an eventual settlement.

Our objective in South Vietnam has never been the annihilation of the enemy. It has been to bring about a recognition in Hanoi that its objective -- taking over the South by force -- could not be achieved.

We think that peace can be based on the Geneva Accords of 1954 -- under political conditions that permit the South Vietnamese -- all the South Vietnamese -- to chart their course free of any outside domination or interference, from us or from anyone else.

So tonight I reaffirm the pledge that we made at Manila -- that we are prepared to withdraw our forces from South Vietnam as the other side withdraws its forces to the North, stops the infiltration, and the level of violence thus subsides.

Our goal of peace and self-determination in Vietnam is directly related to the future of all of Southeast Asia -- where much has happened to inspire confidence during the past 10 years. We have done all that we knew how to do to contribute and to help build that confidence.

The President praised the progressive developments in much of Asia in recent years and offered the prospect of similar progress in Southeast Asia if North Vietnam would settle the war. He repeated the Johns Hopkins offer of assistance to North Vietnam to rebuild its economy. In his peroration he spoke with deep conviction and much feeling about the purposes and reasons for the U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia's.

destiny which he had authorized. It represents perhaps our best insight into the President's understanding and motivation in the war, as well as his hopes and dreams:

One day, my fellow citizens, there will be peace in Southeast Asia.

It will come because the people of Southeast Asia want it -- those whose armies are at war tonight, and those who, though threatened, have thus far been spared.

Peace will come because Asians were willing to work for it -- and to sacrifice for it -- and to die by the thousands for it.

But let it never be forgotten: peace will come also because America sent her sons to help secure it.

It has not been easy -- far from it. During the past four and a half years, it has been my fate and my responsibility to be commander-in-chief. I have lived -- daily and nightly -- with the cost of this war. I know the pain that it has inflicted. I know perhaps better than anyone the misgivings that it has aroused.

Throughout this entire, long period, I have been sustained by a single principle:

-- that what we are doing now, in Vietnam, is vital not only to the security of Southeast Asia; but it is vital to the security of every American.

Surely we have treaties which we must respect. Surely we have commitments that we are going to keep. Resolutions of the Congress testify to the need to resist aggression in the world and in Southeast Asia.

But the heart of our involvement in South Vietnam -- under three Presidents, three separate Administrations -- has always been America's own security.

And the larger purpose of our involvement has always been to help the nations of Southeast Asia become independent and stand alone, self-sustaining as members of a great world community.

-- At peace with themselves, and at peace with all others.

With such an Asia, our country -- and the world -- will be far more secure than it is tonight.

I believe that a peaceful Asia is far nearer to reality, because of what America has done in Vietnam. I believe that the men who endure the dangers of battle -- fighting there for us tonight -- are helping the entire world avoid far greater conflicts, far wider wars, far more destruction, than this one.

The peace that will bring them home some day will come. Tonight I have offered the first in what I hope will be a series of mutual moves toward peace.

I pray that it will not be rejected by the leaders of North Vietnam. I pray that they will accept it as a means by which the sacrifices of their own people may be ended, And I ask your help and your support, my fellow citizens, for this effort to reach across the battlefield toward an early peace.

Listing the achievements of his administration and warning against the perils of division in America, the President ended his speech with his emotional announcement that he would not run for re-election.

Through all time to come, I think America will be a stronger nation, a more just society, and a land of greater opportunity and fulfillment because of what we have all done together in these years of unparalleled achievement.

Our reward will come in the life of freedom, peace, and hope that our children will enjoy through ages ahead.

What we won when all of our people united just must not now be lost in suspicion, distrust, selfishness, and politics among any of our people.

Believing this as I do, I have concluded that I should not permit the Presidency to become involved in the partisan divisions that are developing in this political year.

With America's sons in the fields far away, with America's future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world's hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to

any duties other than the awesome duties of this office -- the Presidency of your country.

Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my Party for another term as your President.

But let men everywhere know, however, that a strong, a confident, and a vigilant America stands ready tonight to seek an honorable peace -- and stand ready tonight to defend an honored cause -- whatever the price, whatever the burden, whatever the sacrifices that duty may require.

Thank you for listening.

Good night and God bless all of you.

The speech had an electric effect on the U.S. and the whole world. It completely upset the American political situation, spurred world-wide hopes that peace might be imminent and roused fear and concern in South Vietnam about the depth and reliability of the American commitment. As already noted, no one in the Administration had seriously expected a positive reaction from Hanoi, and when the North Vietnamese indicated three days later that they would open direct contacts with the U.S. looking toward discussions and eventual negotiation of a peaceful settlement of the conflict, the whole complexion and context of the war was changed. To be sure, there was the unfortunate and embarrassing wrangle about exactly where the northern limit of the U.S. bombing would be fixed, with CINCPAC having sent extremely heavy sorties to the very limits of the 20th parallel on the day after the announcement only to be subsequently ordered to restrict his attacks below 19° on April 3. And there was the exasperatingly long public struggle between the U.S. and the DRV about where their representatives would meet and what title the contacts would be given, not finally resolved until May. But it was unmistakably clear throughout all this time that a major corner in the war and in American policy had been turned and that there was no going back. The President's decision was enormously well received at home and greeted with enthusiasm abroad where it appeared at long last there was a possibility of removing this annoyingly persistent little war in Asia as a roadblock to progress on other matters of world-wide importance involving East and West.

The President's speech at the end of March was, of course, not the end of the bombing much less the war, and a further history of the role of the limited air strikes could and should be undertaken. But the decision to cut back the bombing, the decision that turned American policy toward a peaceful settlement of the war, is a logical and fitting place to terminate this particular inquiry into the policy process that surrounded the air war. Henceforth, the decisions about the bombing would be made primarily in the Pacific by the field commanders since no vitally sensitive targets

requiring continuing Washington level political review were within the reduced attack zone. A very significant chapter in the history of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war had come to a close.

As those who struggled with the policy decisions about the bombing came to learn, any dispassionate and objective appraisal of it is almost impossible. As McGeorge Bundy noted in September 1967 after the Stennis hearings, both its proponents and its opponents have been guilty of excesses in their advocacy and criticism. As Bundy put it, "My own summary belief is that both the advocates and the opponents of the bombing continue to exaggerate its importance." 68/ To be sure, the bombing had not been conducted to its fullest potential, but on the other hand it had been much heavier and had gone on much longer than many if not most of its advocates had expected at the outset. Whether more might have been accomplished by different bombing policy decisions, at the start or along the way -- in particular the fast full squeeze favored by the JCS -- would necessarily remain an open question. What can be said in the end is that its partial suspension in part did produce what most had least expected -- a breakthrough in the deadlock over negotiations. And that in the longer view of history may turn out to be its most significant contribution.